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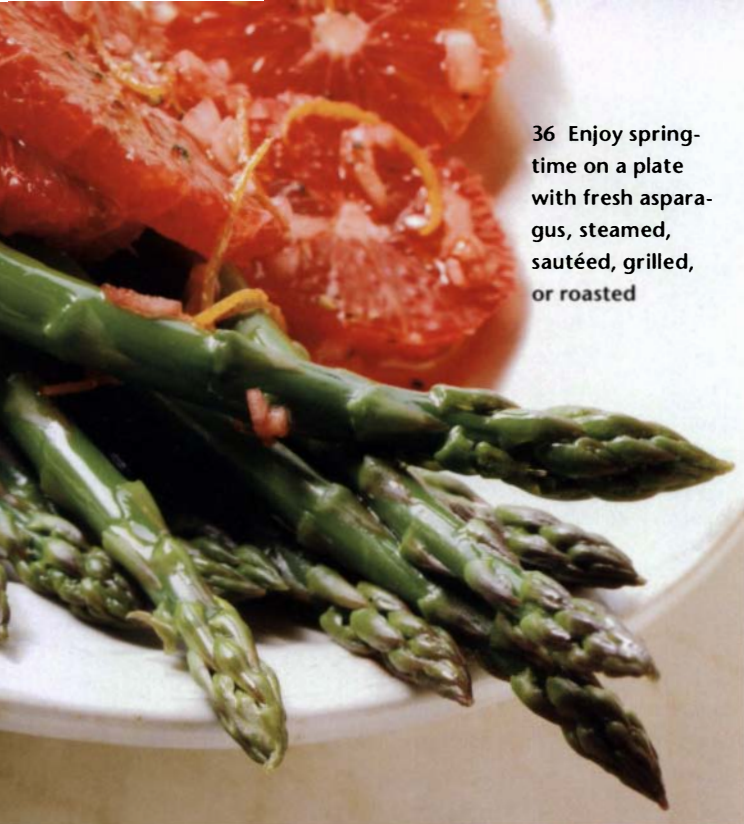
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No, you don't need raw fish to make this dish—try a California roll with crabmeat or a spicy grilled tuna roll

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68 Delicious Butterscotch Desserts

by Melissa Murphy

Caramel with a kick, butterscotch gives a rich, deep, buttery flavor to pudding, pears, ice cream, and tarts

On the cover: *Lemon Curd*, p. 52.

Cover photo, Rita Maas. These pages: top left, Grey Crawford (pepitass and sorbet); Rita Maas (taco); above, Brian Hagiwara; below, Melissa's by Mail; left, Mark Ferri.



14 Add bright flavor and color to desserts and salads with exotic tropical fruits like this carambola



Lucia Watson (right, "Roast Chicken," p. 30) is the chef-owner of Lucia's Restaurant, an American-style bistro in Minneapolis and one of *Gourmet* magazine's regional best, now celebrating its 13th year. Lucia changes her menu every week, except for the one week

in August when she closes shop and takes her two dogs to Rainy Lake in Canada. Co-author (with Beth Dooley) of *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland*, Lucia teaches cooking in Minneapolis and in Mexico. She recently completed the Master Sommelier course in

wine and has just returned from touring vineyards in France, from Bordeaux to Champagne.

Beth Dooley (left) is a New Jersey transplant to Minneapolis who lives with her husband and three young sons—all hungry hockey players. She teaches cooking and

writes food articles, essays, and restaurant reviews for *Mpls/St. Paul Magazine* and *The Garden Letter*, as well as for "The Splendid Table," a Minnesota Public Radio program with Lynne Rossetto Kasper. Beth's books include *It's the Berries* and *Peppers Hot & Sweet*.

Seen Lippert ("Asparagus," p. 36) is the executive chef at Across the Street in New York City. Her cooking style—using only the best of what's in season—stems from a childhood spent in California's fertile Central Valley, eating fresh fruits and vegetables picked from her own backyard. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in 1985 with the highest honors ever received, Seen went on to work at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. For the past two years, New Yorkers have enjoyed her talent in the kitchen, although patrons are never sure what to expect: Seen changes the menu daily.



Before opening Follonico restaurant in Manhattan, **Alan Tardi** ("Risotto," p. 40) cooked at some of New York's finest restaurants, including Lafayette, Chanterelle, and Le Madri. When

he's not behind the stove at Follonico, Alan is usually working on his newest project, renovating an 18th-century water-powered grist mill in upstate New York, where he'll soon be stone-grinding flour and cornmeal for artisan bakeries and for mail order.

Mary Sue Milliken and **Susan Feniger** ("Taco Party," p. 46), known to millions as those Too Hot Tamales, crossed paths twenty years ago when they were the first women to work in the kitchen of Le Perroquet, a distinguished Chicago restaurant. Since then, they have opened three restaurants, including the popular Border Cafe in Santa Monica, have published four cookbooks, including *Mesa Mexicana*,

and have hosted two successful television series, "Too Hot Tamales" and the new "Tamales World Tour."

Elinor Klivans ("Lemon Curd," p. 52) believes everyone can have a homemade dessert ready at a moment's notice. To show people how easy that can be, she's written *Bake & Freeze Desserts*, which was nominated for an IACP/Julia Child Award for Best First Cookbook, and *Bake & Freeze Chocolate Desserts*. A former restaurant dessert chef in her hometown of Camden, Maine, Elinor studied pastry in France at La Varenne and at Ecole Lenôte.



Susie Middleton ("Baking Sheets," p. 55) became obsessed with baking sheets while cooking millions of quiches, roast tenderloins, and other take-out fare for a gourmet market in Newport, Rhode Island. Susie, a graduate of Peter Kump's New York Cooking School, is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.

Casablanca-born **Kitty Morse** ("Lamb Tagine," p. 58) is the author of seven cookbooks, including the forthcoming *A Biblical Feast* (Ten Speed Press, 1998) and *Cooking at the Kasbah: Recipes from a Moroccan Kitchen* (Chronicle, 1998). She leads annual gastronomic tours to Morocco, where she gives cooking seminars in her family home, an ancient pasha's residence south of Casablanca. She lives in the San Diego area.

Jan Newberry ("Maple," p. 60) is a food writer and cookbook editor. She received a blue ribbon diploma (with highest honors) from Peter Kump's New York Cooking School in 1988 and was the managing editor of *Fine Cooking* for three years before 26 inches of snow in a single day drove her to search for a milder climate, which she found last year in Oakland, California.

Peggi Whiting ("Sushi," p. 63) and her husband, Clint, have been the chef-owners of Ichiban Sushi, in Park City, Utah, for the past ten years. Whiting was the first American woman to train under a master sushi chef in Japan. While this experience was "intense, to say the least," according to Whiting, the Japanese were so enamored with this female American sushi chef that they put her on four national television shows.



Melissa Murphy ("Butterscotch Desserts," p. 68) is a pastry chef who trained at Manhattan's French Culinary Institute and has worked in the pastry departments of many

fine restaurants in New York City. Her desserts have been praised by such magazines as *Pastry Art & Design* and *New York*. Melissa has just opened her own pastry shop/café, Sweet Melissa, near her home in Brooklyn, where she offers hot fruit biscuits with homemade preserves and fruit butters every morning, a proper afternoon tea, baking classes for kids, and—of course—heavenly desserts and specialty cakes.



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Here are the three Artisan Food pieces that were most popular with our subscribers.

Who are those people on your back cover?

I'm usually very interested in the Artisan Foods department on the back cover of your magazine. The last article was about two women who run a marzipan company from a Manhattan loft. I can never find any information about the companies you feature in this department. I'd like it very much if you could include a way to contact these people in the future.

—Barbara Thurber, via e-mail

Editors' reply: Thanks for being as excited about Artisan Foods as we are. Dedicating our back cover to editorial content rather than to advertising is a signature feature of *Fine Cooking* and all the other Taunton Press magazines.

The back cover of a magazine is "prime real estate," and although we wouldn't mind the income an ad would bring us, we prefer to use that big, glossy page to present people around the country who use traditional, often painstaking, methods and materials to make delicious, interesting, gorgeous food.

As Barbara Thurber noted, we don't include addresses and telephone numbers because we want to be clear that Artisan Foods is not a promotional piece; however, readers can write, call, or e-mail us for more information.

Save your turkey fat for better biscuits

The Technique Class by Jim Peterson on gravy (FC #24,

p. 20) has only one flaw: Mr. Peterson advocates throwing away wonderful turkey fat. I reserve fat from my turkeys and other poultry for making biscuits. I find that poultry fat makes better biscuits than either butter or shortening. I keep the fat in the refrigerator for making drop biscuits on a weekend morning.

—Henry Troup, via e-mail

Returning home to a bowl of pasta

I'm writing to say that I must have a twin out there. After reading *Quick & Delicious* by Lidia Bastianich (FC #24, p. 98), I thought "That's me." I go out of town many weekends, and I always know what I'm cooking the minute I get home: pasta. My recipe is similar to Lidia's, except that I use my own canned tomatoes; in the summer I use fresh ones.

—Mary L. Sweeten, Clear Lake, IA

Clarifications

♦ Several readers have questioned us about the ingredient amounts in the Chocolate Cut-Out and Lemon Snow Drop cookies (FC #24, p. 69) because they felt there wasn't enough liquid in the dough. The recipe amounts are correct: the key is that the butter must *truly* be at room temperature, which will make it quite soft. We should have made that detail more clear, and we apologize to anyone who had problems.

♦ The rice wine pictured in Flavorings (FC #25, p. 74) is not the type author Barbara Tropp recommends. She uses a golden brown rice wine labeled Shao Hsing, the flavor of which is balanced, nutty, and sherry-like. ♦

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Shiny or dull side of aluminum foil?

When you're cooking with aluminum foil, will the food take longer if the shiny side faces away from the food, deflecting heat?

—Todd Luft, Petoskey, MI

Carol Owen replies: We're often asked this question. It makes no difference which side faces out or in during cooking. We've tested it in our laboratory, and though our lab equipment picked up a very slight reflectivity difference, the difference is so small that it doesn't affect cooking.

You may be interested to know that the dull and shiny sides are created by the foil manufacturing

Aluminum foil's shiny and dull sides make no difference in cooking—they're a result of the manufacturing process.

process. In the final rolling step, two layers of aluminum foil are passed through the rolling mill at the same time. The sides that come in contact with the mill's highly polished steel rolls become shiny. The sides that end up coming

in contact with each other come out with a matte finish. Carol Owen is the director of consumer services for the Reynolds Metals Company.

How to discourage pantry bugs

How do I keep pantry bugs away from my spices? They especially love cumin and coriander seeds, and of course, as long as they're there, they get into the flour and noodles, too.

—Felicity Ferguson, Bedford, NY

Ken Welch and Rochelle Zabarkes reply: Pantry pests are a variety of beetle or moth. They especially love to live in refined flours, cracked grains, and spices, and they arrive in your cabinet via the food itself or another food item that was already infested with them.

Storing your spices in the freezer for at least three days will help to eliminate the bug problem, but the moisture tends to mess up the labels, and the spices may get damp. It's better to store your spices and herbs in jars with tight-

fitting lids in the darkest, coolest part of the cupboard.

Look periodically for brown weevils and check for webs, which are a sure sign that a spice-loving pest has taken up residence. If the pests are rampant, throw away the spice, scour the jar, and start fresh. If there are only a few little critters in a jar, put the jar in the freezer for a few hours, and then strain the spice through a fine-mesh sieve into a clean jar. This works best with finely ground spices; it's not a good idea with coarse spice blends or when webs are present.

Stick a few bay leaves into flour to further discourage



Bay leaves and cloves are among the spices that help deter pantry pests.

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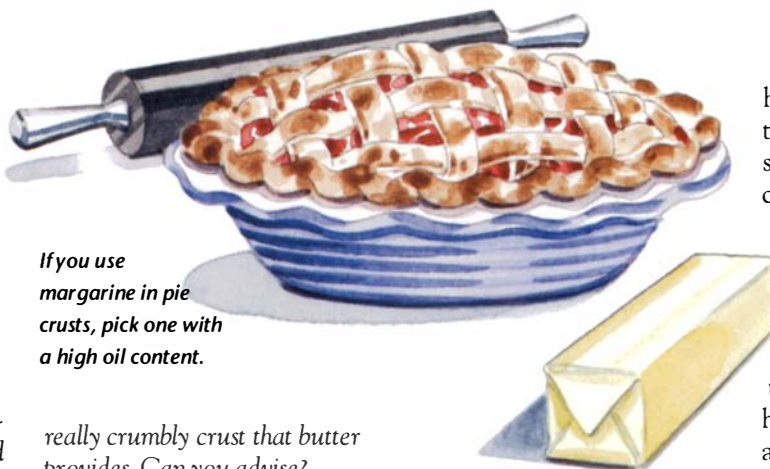
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weevils. Marjoram, oregano, lavender, cloves, tansy, and mint are also good repellents. And the pantry pest traps you find in gardening catalogs and stores are somewhat effective, too.

Ken Welch is an entomologist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. Rochelle Zabarkes owns Adriana's Caravan, a mail-order spice and condiment company in Brooklyn, New York. She's the author of *Adriana's Spice Caravan cookbook* (Storey, 1997).

Pie crusts and margarine

I keep a kosher kitchen, so out of necessity I always use margarine in my cooking and baking. I have a problem rolling out pie crust dough. The dough sticks, and I don't achieve that



If you use margarine in pie crusts, pick one with a high oil content.

really crumbly crust that butter provides. Can you advise?

—Alice Lainer;
Beverly Hills, CA

Susan Purdy replies: There may be two reasons why your pie crust is sticking: either the margarine isn't cold enough, or you're using one that contains too much liquid and not enough oil.

Some margarine spreads and low-fat margarines contain only 30% to 40% oil. The

rest is water, flavorings, and other additives; some margarine spreads do contain a little dairy. And since the percentage of liquid isn't marked on their labels, these fats aren't reliable for pie crusts or any other type of baking, though they're fine for spreads.

The best margarine for your baking needs is a kosher solid stick margarine with a

high percentage of oil (70% to 80%). The labels on most stick margarines list their oil content. I've had good luck with Fleischmann's Unsalted Stick Margarine.

To keep pie crust dough from sticking and to keep the final pastry tender, keep the dough cold, handle it as little as possible, and chill it for at least 30 minutes before rolling it out. For added insurance against sticky dough, keep your margarine frozen until you're ready to use it. Also, pulsing the ingredients in a food processor rather than mixing it by hand keeps your hands from warming up the dough.

Susan Purdy is the author of *Let Them Eat Cake* (William Morrow, 1997) and *Easy as Pie* (Atheneum, 1984). ♦

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Discover the Luscious Flavors of Tropical Fruits



Carambolas (or star fruit) are ripe and ready to eat when their ridges begin to darken (the ones pictured above aren't quite ripe...). The flavor is a subtle blend of apples and grapes, with a light, citrusy tang. Carambola peel is edible, so you don't need to remove it, but if you're a stickler for presentation, use a sharp paring knife or peeler to pare away the dark parts. Toss thin slices into fruit salad to add whimsy and variety. Try setting a slice into the center of a pancake as it cooks in the skillet; kids love the surprising shape.

The calendar says spring, but in most parts of the country, it will still be many weeks before the produce section is loaded with ripe, seasonal fruit. So now's a good time to look south, to explore those odd-looking tropical fruits you've wondered about whenever you've

spied them on the exotic fruit shelf at the supermarket.

Though scaly cherimoyas, spiky horned melons, and wrinkly passionfruit look a little mysterious compared with temperate-zone produce, the fruit that's hidden inside the unfamiliar peels offers bright, luscious flavor.



Passionfruit's black, wrinkly skin is an indication of ripeness—the more dimply, the better the flavor. Passionfruit is quite juicy; when you cut into one, be ready to catch every drop. Rather than a fruit you'd eat out of hand, passionfruit has tasty pulp and juices; these are what you're really after. Force the juicy pulp through a strainer to separate it from the seeds. Whisk passionfruit juice with honey, canola oil, sesame oil, black pepper, and shallots for a delicious dressing for grilled chicken. Passionfruit livens up fruit salads, and its edible seeds are peppery and crunchy.



Papayas have smooth green or greenish-yellow skin. A mottled, spotty look is okay, as long as the papaya feels heavy for its size. A ripe papaya should give when pressed; it should feel a little softer than a mango. The flesh of papayas ranges from yellow-orange to salmon-toned, and it tastes peachy-apricotty, with a musky note. Hollow out the dark seeds, peel the skin, and enjoy papayas in the same way you would mangos. Purée papaya and whisk in a little Champagne vinegar for a light, zippy sauce for grilled fish.

Eaten plain or added to sauces, salsas, or salads, tropicals add zip, and they're a welcome segue into spring.

To get the best taste and texture out of tropical fruits, ripen them at room temperature. When eaten out of hand, however, tropical fruits taste best slightly chilled, so

stow them in the refrigerator for a half an hour or so before enjoying them.

Norman Van Aken is the chef-owner of Norman's in Coral Gables, Florida. His latest book is Norman's New World Cuisine (Random House, 1997). ♦



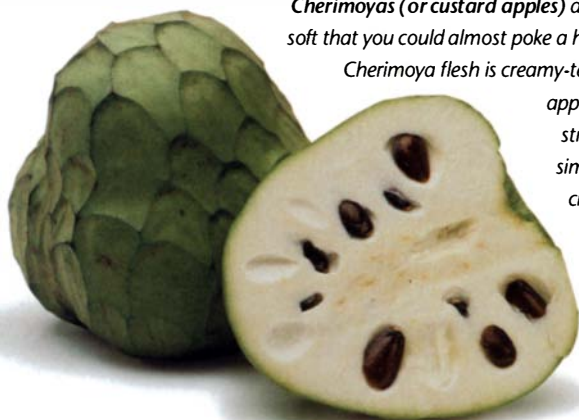
Horned melon tastes more like a vegetable than a fruit. It's at peak ripeness when it turns golden-orange and feels about as firm as a cucumber. The flesh tastes like cucumber, too—with a tangy-sweet note—so try using it in the same way. Make a chilled soup with the edible seeds and pulp, and use the hollowed-out melon as your soup bowl. Try substituting horned melon for cucumber in raita, the classic Indian yogurt dip. Toss the seeds and pulp into fruit salad for visual and textural interest and for a refreshing, tart note.



Mangos come in many varieties whose colors include yellow, red, green, and even purple. A mango is ripe and ready to eat when it's fragrant, is plump around the stem area, and gives slightly when pressed. The juicy, taxi-colored flesh has a tangy and exotic flavor—I think it's just about the most luscious fruit there is. Mangos are great peeled, diced, and eaten plain, and they're delicious in blender drinks, fruit salads, purées, and salsas. Add small chunks of mango to a butter sauce to serve with fish.



A guava's ripeness is best judged by the strength of its sweet, aromatic perfume, rather than by feel. The small seeds are edible, as is the skin, which can be green, white, or even pink—there are many varieties. The flavor of a guava can vary from banana-like to more pineapple. Guava nectar and guava jelly are classic condiments in savory Caribbean cooking; cooked guavas make a delicious base for a ham glaze. Or try fresh, ripe guava sliced with farmer's cheese for a delicious tropical-style breakfast or mid-afternoon snack.



Cherimoyas (or custard apples) are ready to eat when they're so soft that you could almost poke a hole through the (inedible) peel.

Cherimoya flesh is creamy-textured (hence its alias, custard apple), with a pineapple-banana-strawberry taste. Eaten plain and simple, a cherimoya makes a deliciously unusual dessert or snack, so enjoy one as you would a slice of melon: chill briefly, quarter with a knife, and scoop out the flesh with a spoon to work around the large, dark, inedible seeds.

Cook with a creamy new Vermont goat cheese

I love the pleasantly piquant flavor of fresh goat cheeses, but I've always found cooking with them to be tricky due to the variances in moisture content and flavor. Now there's a new product from the Vermont Butter & Cheese Company that solves this problem. It's called Vermont Impastata Creamy Goat Cheese, and it's a creamy, moist, spreadable fresh goat cheese.

Impastata is similar to fresh ricotta in appearance, moisture content, and cooking properties, but it delivers a much livelier flavor.

The marvel of Impastata is how smoothly it incorporates with other ingredients and how beautifully it holds up in recipes, remaining creamy and smooth even when heated.

While Impastata is delicious on its own, what I really enjoy is its versatility. I stir it into sauces, use it as a base for dips and dressings, toss it with warm pasta, season it with herbs to use as a filling for ravioli and shells, pipe it through a pastry bag as a crostini topping, and even mix it with a little maple syrup for a pastry filling. Impastata is available at specialty and natural food stores for around \$4.80 for 8 ounces or directly from the Vermont Butter & Cheese Company at 800/884-6287.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.

Angled wooden spatula is a favorite tool

Here in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen, one of my favorite tools is an angled wooden spatula. These days, since plastic and metal utensils are so popular, cooks tend to forget how efficient, durable, and useful wood is, no matter what the surface of your pan.

I always use this angled spatula instead of a spoon for stirring risotto, lemon curd, and butterscotch sauce (as I did for this issue) and for scraping up browned bits from the bottom of a sauté

pan. The angle of the spatula lets me get into the corners of my pots and pans, while scraping the bottom as well. I find sticking and scorching are no longer a problem.

My favorite angled spatula, a brand called Amish Woods, is made of solid rock maple and costs about \$3. Check kitchen stores or call Tree Spirit at 800/257-4545 for more information.

Abby Dodge wields her spatula in Fine Cooking's test kitchen.

Cyberkitchen: Farmers' markets on the Web

Spring is finally here, and this year, maybe you've decided to forage the farmers' markets for all that beautiful fresh produce. But where's the closest farmers' market to you? When are more mushrooms in season? What do you do with those funky greens and curly garlic buds when you get them home? Turn to "In Season," Mark Thompson's engaging web site at www.marketreport.com. The site currently offers state-by-state farmers' market listings, recipes from chefs, and helpful information on choosing produce, among other features.

Events

MAYHAW FESTIVAL Colquitt, Georgia; April 18

Mayhaws are trees in the rose family that bear red, tart fruit the size of cranberries. Native Americans used mayhaws to preserve venison, but now the fruit is made into jelly that's shipped worldwide. At the festival, you can buy mayhaw syrup, juice, wine, and mayhaw cheese pinwheels; Call 912/758-2400.

WORLD'S BIGGEST FISH FRY Henry County Fairgrounds, Paris, Tennessee; April 20-25

Every year, 100,000 people flock to tiny Paris (population 9,000) for the all-you-can-eat deep-fried catfish dinner, served with hush puppies, French fries, cole slaw, white beans, and a drink. Call 901/642-3431.

CRAB & SEAFOOD FESTIVAL Hammond Mooring Basin, Warrenton, Oregon; April 24-26

Dozens of seafood vendors and wineries celebrate Oregon's bounty with barbecued oysters and tuna, salmon chowder, Dungeness crab, grilled or cold smoked oysters, local grape wines and a number of fruit wines. Call 503/325-6311.

ASPARAGUS FESTIVAL Oak Grove Regional Park, Stockton, California; April 24-26

Stockton is the asparagus capital of the world, with 30,000 acres under cultivation. At the festival, you'll see plenty of creative asparagus dishes, including enchiladas, bisque, sherry cake, and shortcake; also, demonstrations by celebrity chefs and a recipe contest. Call 209/467-8001.

COCHON DE LAIT FESTIVAL Mansura, Louisiana; May 7-9

This giant pig roast revives the old Cajun custom of spit-roasting whole sucklings (cochons de lait) over a wood fire. Today, festival cooks roast grown pigs to accommodate the crowds who come to feast. Call the Chamber of Commerce at 318/964-2887.

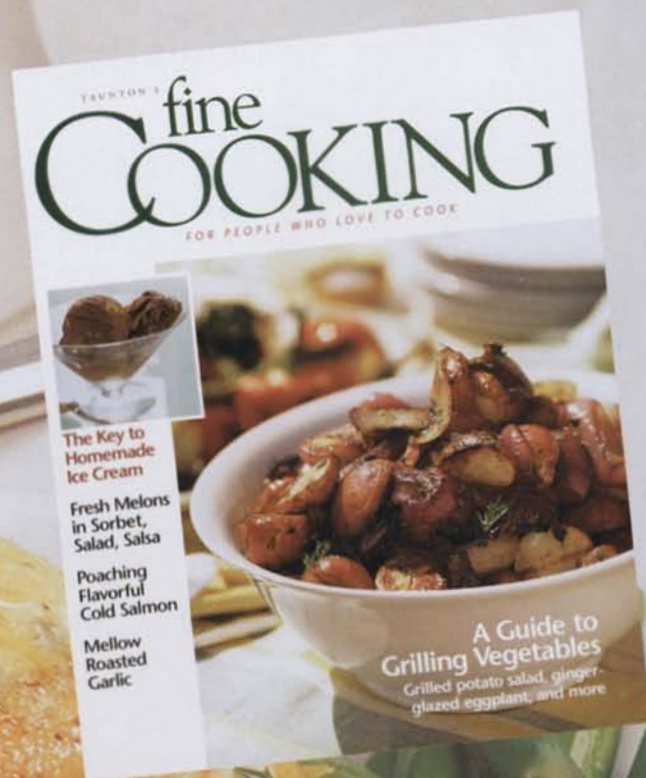
Send August and September event listings (by May 1) to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or e-mail (fc@taunton.com).

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Black & Decker food processor heads premium line of kitchen tools



In my household, there are at least a couple of Black & Decker tools that get a regular workout. So when I heard about the company's new premium line of kitchen equipment, I was curious. I decided to see if the food processor, the biggest workhorse in the new line (which includes a blender, stand mixer, hand mixer, thermal carafe coffee-maker, and can opener) could satisfy a busy cook.

If the food processor is any indication, the new line,

called "kitchentools," should please many. The powerful food processor has an 800-watt motor (roughly about 1 horsepower, which is equal to or stronger than similar-size food processors), reversible slicing and shredding disks with several size options, and 9- and 3-cup work bowls. The 3-cup mini bowl was definitely my favorite feature, as I used it often to chop ginger, garlic, and chiles. I liked the machine's comfortable rubber-gripped handle and the easy-to-clean rubber surface of the base. All

the parts store handily in a (rather large) plastic case.

I sliced and shredded several different vegetables (making delicious carrot fritters from Michele Anna Jordan's new *California Home Cooking*), successfully mixed my favorite food-processor tart dough (Johanne Killeen and George Germon's recipe in *Cucina Simpatica*), and made an incredibly speedy and easy pizza dough from Evan Kleiman's book, *Pizza, Pasta, Panini*.

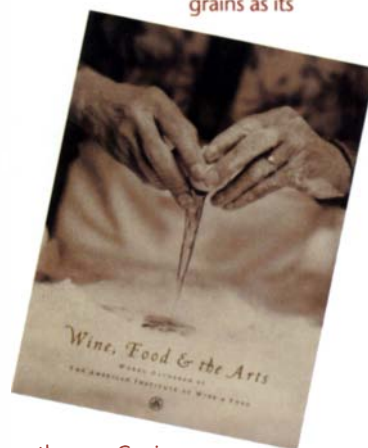
I learned that this isn't the machine for serious bread bakers, as it didn't have enough power to make the ciabatta dough that my co-worker normally makes in his food processor, nor does it have the minimum 11-cup work bowl that Charles Van Over recommends for making bread in a food processor in his book, *The Best Bread Ever*. But in other capacities, the food processor functioned smoothly and quietly.

For more information on Black & Decker's "kitchentools," call 888/548-8665 or check www.kitchentools.com (where the food processor can be purchased directly for \$209).

Susie Middleton is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.

A New Book to Celebrate Food and Art

The American Institute of Wine & Food (a national organization founded by Julia Child, Robert Mondavi, and Richard Graff) has produced a second beautiful collection of artwork, photography, and essays that celebrates the marriage of gastronomy and the arts. This volume, with a striking cover photo (below) of "Julia Child Creating a Brioche" by Thomas Heinser, uses bread and grains as its



themes. Copies of *Wine, Food & The Arts: Works gathered by The American Institute of Wine & Food, Volume II*, as well as *Volume I*, are available for \$20 each, or \$35 for the set, by calling the AIWF's membership department at 800/274-2493. ♦

Events

JACQUES PEPIN

DEMO & DINNER

New Haven, Connecticut; May 8

Celebrate the creation of the Institute of Gastronomy & Culinary Arts at the University of New Haven. Recipes from Chef Pepin's books will be used in the demo, with a limited-seating VIP dinner afterward. For reservations, call the AIWF voicemail at 203/967-6238.

CHOCOLATE CITY

FESTIVAL

Burlington Festival Grounds, Burlington, Wisconsin; May 15-17
About 100,000 chocoholics flock here to devour a gigantic chocolate sculpture made by Nestlé every year. Once it was a 2,700-lb. chocolate kiss. A jackhammer is used to break up the sculpture, and the chocolate is given to the crowd. Call 414/763-6044.

WEST VIRGINIA

STRAWBERRY

FESTIVAL

Buckhannon, West Virginia; May 20-24
Banners festoon Buckhannon for this fair, which begins with a blessing of the berries at the courthouse. Then it's time to eat: strawberry slushes, pies, shortcakes, pancakes, muffins, ice cream, jam, and syrup. Call 304/472-1722.

MONTEREY SQUID

FESTIVAL

Monterey Fairgrounds, Monterey, California; May 23-24
Learn all about this fascinating mollusk as you eat your way through fried calamari, Cajun fried squid, squid quesadilla, calamari parmesan, key lime calamari, squid marinara, calamari flambé, chowder, and barbecue. Call 408/649-6544.

WATERMELON

FESTIVAL

De Soto Park, Arcadia, Florida; May 23-25
Lots of watermelons are grown here, and at festival time they're sold for modest sums, whole or sliced. You'll also find watermelon ice cream, watermelon ices (like snow-cones in a cup), Italian watermelon ice, watermelon jelly, and pickled watermelon rind. Call 941/494-9500.

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The proper size pan ensures good results.

Don't crowd the food or it will steam and not brown.

and fillets are good candidates, as are pork, lamb, and veal chops and chicken breasts. Pailards (pronounced pie-YARDS; also called cutlets and escalopes) are literally made for a sauté.

Dry the food and season it before it hits the pan. If the surface of the food is moist, it will release steam, which prevents the formation of a crust. Pat dry both sides of the item with a paper towel. Sprinkle both sides with coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper. A spice rub or marinade are also excellent ways to add flavor to a sauté (just

be sure to dry food that has been marinated).

USE A COATING TO BROWN AND ADD FLAVOR

Most thick pieces of fish or meat don't require a coating—they're thick enough so that the outside will brown nicely and end up with a savory outer crust before the inside overcooks. Thinner meats (such as veal scaloppini or thin fish fillets) brown better when lightly coated with flour, which browns at a lower temperature than the fish or meat.

PICK THE PROPER PAN

Two kinds of pans are used for sautéing, one with sloping sides and one with straight sides. Sloping sides make it easier to toss small items by jerking the pan up and towards you so that the pieces of food hit the rim of the pan

One of the simplest and quickest ways to cook tender meat, poultry, and fish is to sauté it. The key to making sautéed foods taste truly delicious is to encourage a savory crust to form on both the food and the pan. The caramelized crust on the food gives it a wonderful texture and deep flavor; the crust in

the pan, when deglazed with wine or broth, provides a flavorful base for a tasty sauce.

BEGIN WITH TENDER MEAT, POULTRY, OR FISH

Because sautéing cooks food rapidly without much tenderizing, whatever you sauté must be naturally tender. Meat and fish cut into steaks

Drying the food and heating the pan produces a golden brown exterior



Dry the food before putting it in the pan. Sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper.



Heat a heavy-based skillet or sauté pan and then add the fat. Oil is ready when it ripples; butter is ready when the foaming just begins to subside.



Coat thinner pieces of meat with flour. Dredge just before the cutlet goes in the pan or the flour can get gummy.

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Browning the food leaves caramelized bits to deglaze for a sauce



Cook the meat, turning once. Most meats are cooked when the flesh just begins to feel firm.



Degrease the pan. Spoon or pour off the fat, leaving the flavorful brown bits behind.



Deglaze the pan for a savory sauce. Pour in wine or broth and stir with a wooden spoon, scraping up the brown bits. (Sauté some shallots in the pan first if you like.) Simmer the liquid until reduced by half.

and roll back, shifting their position.

A straight-sided sauté pan is good for sautéing larger items, such as pieces of meat or fish, which would be difficult to toss. Because you turn these foods with tongs, the sloping sides aren't important. Whatever pan you use, it should have a heavy base, which retains heat and cooks food more evenly.

Choose a size to fit the food in a single layer. If the pan is too large, the areas of the pan not covered by food will overheat, causing the juices to burn. If the pan is too small, any food not in contact with the pan will steam.

For making a sauce, pass on the nonstick. Nonstick pans are great for sautéing very delicate food, like fish, but the savory juices—those flavorful brown bits—won't adhere to a nonstick pan, and so you'll have nothing to deglaze if it's your intent to make a sauce.

Don't cover the pan. A cover traps steam and prevents juices from caramelizing into a savory crust.

CHOOSE A FLAVORFUL FAT

When choosing a fat to use for sautéing, consider its smoking point as well as its flavor. Because these foods cook quickly, you can often get away with using a flavorful fat with a lower smoking point, such as butter or animal fats, instead of less flavorful vegetable oils, which can withstand higher temperatures. Olive oil gives

will cause the foods to release juices but won't be hot enough to evaporate and caramelize them. Instead, the liquid will flow out into the pan and the food will steam and boil instead of sauté, so be sure to get your pan quite hot.

The fat needs to be hot, too, before you add the food. Vegetable or olive oil and clarified butter should be heated

As they cook, they begin to feel firm. As soon as there's no hint of fleshiness, take the food out of the pan. A similar test works for red meat, but you'll have to learn what your steak feels like when cooked the way you like it.

You can also cut discreetly into the fish or meat and take a peek. But don't forget to feel the food as well; you'll quickly learn how to equate texture with doneness.

Both a hot pan and hot fat are crucial to a good sauté.

you the benefit of both great flavor and a relatively high smoking point.

Clarifying butter to get rid of its milk solids allows it to tolerate higher temperatures, but doing so can be a nuisance. If you're sautéing foods that cook quickly, you can sauté with whole butter as long as you watch the pan and quickly lower the heat if the butter threatens to burn.

Heat the pan and the fat before adding foods. A pan that's not quite hot enough

until they ripple in the pan. Whole butter should be heated just until its foaming begins to subside. Add the food immediately.

DECIDE WHEN IT'S DONE BY TOUCH

Determining when a food is cooked through is a matter of touch, sight, and experience.

By gently pressing against the food's surface, you can judge its doneness. White meats and fish feel fleshy during the beginning of cooking.

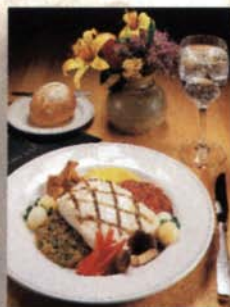
MAKE A SAUCE FROM THE BROWNE BITS

After pouring off the fat, deglaze the caramelized juices with a flavorful liquid—white or red wine, meat or fish stock, balsamic vinegar, or a fruit juice. You can use this simple pan-deglazed sauce as it is or as the base for a more involved sauce, which might include sautéing shallots in the pan and then adding cream or butter for body, and herbs, spices, and mustard for more flavor.

James Peterson's latest book is Vegetables (William Morrow, 1998). He's a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

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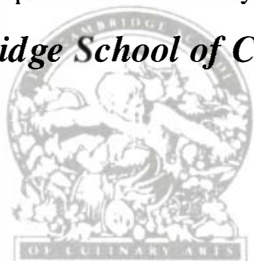
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Shopping for Wine with Confidence

Like any other good store, a wine shop has resources to help you make sound purchases.

If you haven't done it much, combing the shelves of a well-stocked wine store, trying to find the right bottle—for tonight's dinner, for a gift, or for future drinking—can make you bleary-eyed. There are so many goodies to choose from, but the name of every bottle you've ever known and loved or wanted to try has slipped your mind. And many people don't feel comfortable

asking for help because we're all supposed to know about wine, right?

But if you're armed with a few shopping strategies, it's easy to avoid being overwhelmed and to enjoy hunting for delicious bottles. Here are some pointers for using all the resources a good wine shop has to offer so you can buy wines that make you happy when you pull the cork.

LISTEN, TALK, AND READ BEFORE YOU BUY

Whether you're trying to buy a medium-bodied red under \$10 for tonight's roast chicken or a wine with aging potential, use the same approach you would if you were shopping for a new food processor or range—gather information from several sources.

To find help you like, eavesdrop. Are staffers speak-

ing personably and accessibly to other customers ("This Shiraz is fruity, dry, and tastes great with grilled steak")? If you like what you hear, snag that friendly help, or ask for another wine-savvy employee. When you find a salesperson you feel comfortable with, ask for that person whenever you shop. Most sales folk I know are proud of knowing their customers' tastes, and they really enjoy matching the right wine to the right situation.

Trust your own taste. But what if that knowledgeable, friendly salesperson's taste differs from yours? Ted, who works at one wine shop I frequent, knows a lot and always takes time with me to share his current favorites in all price ranges. Every bottle Ted has suggested has been sound and well-made—but I've never really loved any of them. I still shop at that store, but since Ted's taste is different from mine, I now ask for someone else.

If you're shopping for a certain meal, be specific about what you'll be eating. Chicken curry or grilled chicken marinated in olive oil and rosemary can mean the difference between Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir.

State what you want to spend. "And if you're looking for a cheap bottle to bring to a party, don't hesitate to say so," says Steve Ledbetter, a wine buyer at Prima Wine Merchants in Walnut Creek, California. It might feel awkward, but you won't be offending anyone with "I'm looking to spend around \$10," or "My ceiling is \$20." This narrows the field, which is helpful both

to you and to whoever is waiting on you.

Don't feel obliged to use wine jargon. You needn't say you're looking for a woody Cab with cigar-box nuances in the nose, black currant notes mid-palate, and a tarraging finish. Fred Rosen, owner of Sam's, a wine store in Chicago whose staff tastes wine every day, advises that saying what you like ("I just had a light, fruity Tuscan red that was delicious") and what you don't ("I'd rather stay away from super-fruity Chardonnay") gives the best idea of what you're after.

Try some role-reversal. If you encounter salespeople who try to be diplomatic ("Well, it really depends on your taste..."), ask which wine they'd like to drink. My friend John often takes this

A well-stocked wine store is a potential gold mine of tasty bargains and informed guidance.

approach and ends up with great finds. Most wine people love to talk about what they enjoy, so putting them in the role of the drinker is a good way to find out if they can speak enthusiastically and knowingly about the wine.

Read the shelf tags. Many stores have shelf tags (known in the trade as "shelf talkers") that offer number ratings

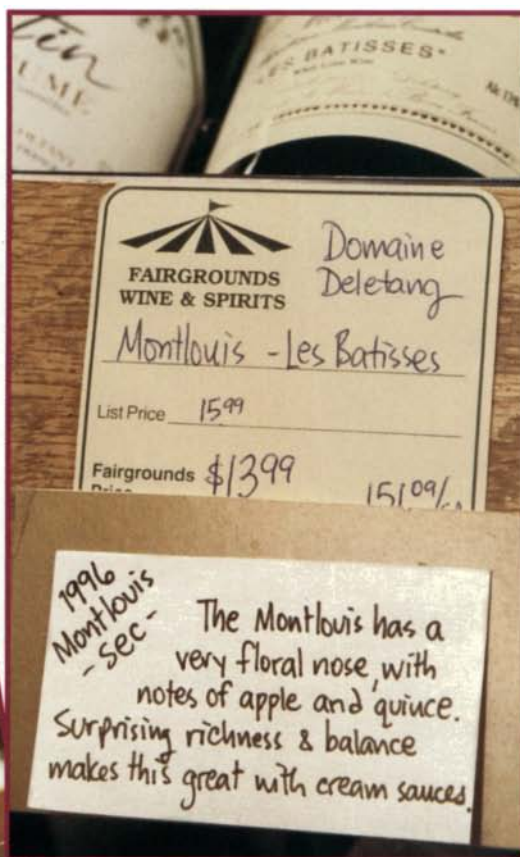
or quotes from wine magazines. Better still are tags with tasting notes written by staffers after a gang of them has tasted the wine and talked about it. Such tags often give helpful food-pairing hints, too.

Get on the mailing list. Many merchants publish newsletters that let you know about future shipments and

specials. In states where they're legal, retailers often give informal, drop-by tastings. They're free, and tasting is the best way of all to learn about wine.

Devise a fallback strategy. Not all stores that sell wine sell good wine, nor do the salespeople always know more than you do. If you find yourself in a store that's stronger on gallon jugs and hard liquor, don't go hunting for that exquisite bottle from a small, little-known producer. Better to go for tried and true names you recognize, such as Joseph Drouhin or Louis Jadot from France, Mondavi or Kendall-Jackson from California, Lindeman's from Australia, or Pio Cesare from Italy.

Amy Albert, an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*, loves to poke around in wine shops wherever she goes. ♦



Row after row of bottles can be dizzying, but a good wine store has signs, staff, and even tastings to help you find what you're after.



Do you have a better way to clean fresh greens, a neat trick for handling sticky bread dough, or a new way to use an old kitchen tool? Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.



Make a paste of baking soda and water to soothe stinging fingers after cutting chiles.

Baking soda relieves burns from hot chiles

Many times when I make a quick salsa, salad, or southwestern meal, I chop chiles without rubber gloves. Usually this doesn't irritate my hands, but on occasion they tingle and turn pink. I find that the best remedy is to put a bit of baking soda mixed with a little water in the palm of my hand or on my fingertips, and rub the paste over my hands, and then rinse. The irritation goes away.

—Paul-Marcel St. Onge,
Chandler, AZ

Deli container holds twine

We've discovered an easy and inexpensive way to keep our butcher twine clean and handy. We take a clear plastic container from the deli counter that's big enough to hold the twine (pint-sized), cut a hole in the middle of the lid (two slash marks with a knife works), and fish the twine through. We haven't chased a ball of twine since.

—Bill Apodaca & Cheryl Keller,
Royal Oak, MI



Keep butcher twine handy in a clear plastic deli container. Feed the twine through an X cut in the lid.

Coffee between two paper filters is less messy

To keep cone-shaped coffee filters from collapsing and spilling grounds into the brew, or spattering the hard-to-clean areas of the coffee-maker, I add a second filter on top of the measured coffee.

—Jean Linton,
Adell, WI

Freeze rows of fresh ginger slices

Since fresh ginger often goes bad before you can use it all, here's a way to keep it on hand at all times. Simply peel and slice it into "coins," lay



Peel fresh ginger, slice it into coins, and freeze in a zip-top bag for later use.

the slices in rows on plastic wrap, and fold the plastic over to cover the slices tightly. Put the package in a zip-top bag and freeze. You can take out a few slices at a time as needed—they defrost quickly. The consistency is slightly limp, but the flavor is still intense.

—Jayne Hollerbaugh,
Tampa, FL

Flavor broth with roasted garlic skins

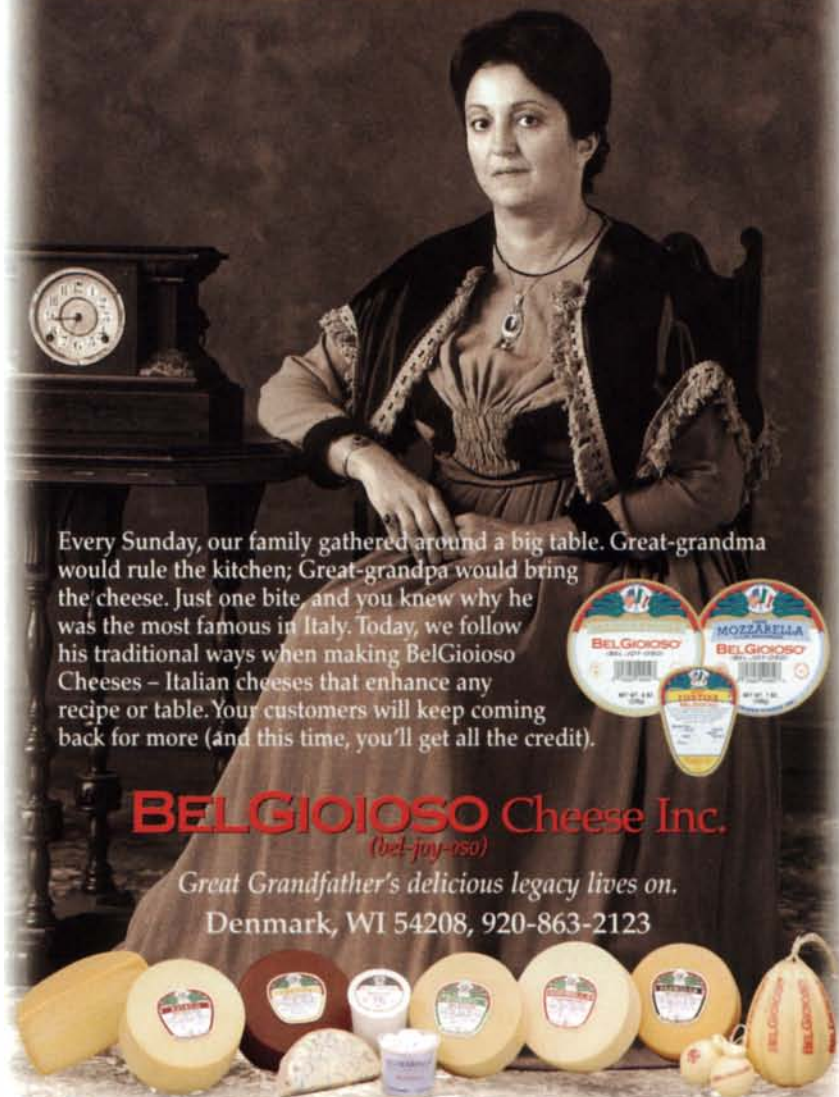
After squeezing cloves of roasted garlic, don't throw the skins away. Put them in a small pot with some water and a little salt, simmer for about 20 minutes, and strain. You'll have a delicious broth.

—Yvonne Mounsey,
Roberts Creek,
British Columbia

An easy way to save carving juices

When carving a steak or a grilled butterflied leg of lamb, I find I save clean-up time—and I don't lose any delicious meat juices—by carving the meat on a cutting board set inside a rimmed baking sheet on the countertop. Juices run off the board onto the baking sheet, and they can then be

"Great-grandma made the pasta, the bread, the salad, the soup, the butter and the dessert. Great-grandpa made the cheese. (And you can guess who got all the credit.)"



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- 1 package of any EDEN Organic Traditional Pasta
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- 1 medium carrot, cut into matchsticks
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 cups Chinese cabbage or bok choy
- 3 tbs. EDEN Shoyu
- 2 tbs. grated ginger
- 1/4 cup EDEN Tamari Almonds, sliced

Cook pasta. Rinse, drain; mix with 1 tbs. oil. Set aside. Reserve shiitake liquid, discard stems and slice tops. Heat remaining oil, sauté onion. Add carrots, shiitakes and soaking liquid, simmer for 5 minutes. Mix in pasta, greens, shoyu and ginger. Cover and cook for 2-3 more minutes. Add almonds.

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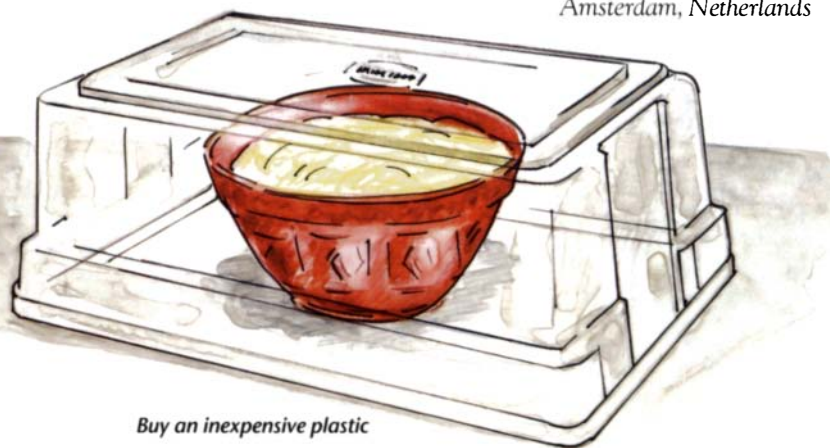
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poured back onto the meat or discarded without mopping up the counter. To keep both the carving board and baking sheet from moving while carving, I lay a wet paper towel under each one.

—Elise Quimby,
Bridgehampton, NY

Plastic storage box makes an excellent proofing box

Some of the best artisan breads, like ciabatta (*Fine Cooking* #12), are made from light, wet doughs that require a long rising time. Covering the dough with towels can hinder a full rise, but the dough sticks to lighter materials like plastic wrap. To solve the problem and provide an ideal environment, you can buy a half-sheet, acrylic proof cover from specialty suppliers



Buy an inexpensive plastic storage box to use as an ideal proofing box for wet doughs.

for about \$50—or you can buy a clear plastic storage box of the same dimensions at your local variety store for one-tenth of the price. (Walmart, for example, sells a 4-gallon Rubbermaid model for just \$5.) Once you try it, you won't want to use any other method.

—Jack Sears,
Port Orchard, WA

Thicken soups with flavorful liquids

When a stew or ragoût has finished cooking and the liquid is ready to be thickened, taste it for flavor. If it's just right, don't thicken it with water mixed with cornstarch. Use one of the liquid ingredients in the stew, like a bit of the cooking broth or wine, to make a thin paste with the cornstarch. The sauce will retain its strength and desired flavor.

—Barbara Kramer,
Albuquerque, NM

Remove odors with coffee grounds

To remove garlic or onion smell from your hands, rub them with spent coffee grounds. The acidity cuts through even the most stubborn odors.

—Phil Ballman,
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Try orange juice for tender pie crust

For a more tender and flavorful crust for fruit pies or tarts, substitute orange juice for ice water. It's always chilled since it stays in the fridge. The fruit flavor is only discernible as an intriguing tang, which you'll miss if you try it again with water. The acidity cuts the gluten, which is the component that makes pastry tough.

—Sara Zwicker,
Braintree, MA



Insert a skewer into a cabbage wedge to hold it together during cooking.

Skewers hold cabbage wedges together

To prevent cabbage wedges from falling apart in dishes such as corned beef and cabbage, insert a wooden skewer into the back of each wedge before cooking. Be sure to remove the skewers before serving. This technique greatly improves presentation, and it makes the cabbage easier to eat.

—Lynne Persinger,
Houston, TX

Fluff rice with chopsticks to release steam

The best way to ensure that steamed rice remains light and the grains separate is to fluff it gently with two chopsticks as soon as it's finished cooking. Hold the chopsticks slightly apart and fluff the rice to release steam. Cover the rice with a cloth tea towel to absorb excess moisture and serve it quickly. Leftover cold rice can also be separated this way to use in fried rice.

—Susan Asanovic,
Wilton, CT

Peel tomatoes with a potato peeler

To quickly and easily skin tomatoes, I use a sharp potato peeler. The trick is that I don't use the quick stroking move-

ment I use when peeling potatoes and carrots. Instead, I hold the peeler perpendicular to the tomato and gently saw back and forth as I move the blade slowly forward. This method also works great for removing strips of citrus zest.

—Emily DeFazio,
Holbrook, NY

Reduce broiling smoke

To reduce smoke and cooking odors when broiling, put a few slices of stale bread in the broiler pan under the rack to absorb dripping fat. Just be sure the rack is positioned an inch or two above the bread.

—Betsy Race,
Euclid, OH

Use plastic manicotti trays for transporting éclairs

I have a tip for transporting cannolis and éclairs. Whenever I buy dry manicotti shells, I save the plastic trays that hold the shells in the box. I then use these trays when I bring éclairs or any other similarly shaped dessert to a friend's house. I can stack the plastic trays into a rectangular glass dish and transport them without breaking even one.

—Caryn Tentarelli,
Fogelsville, PA ♦

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Roast Chicken Made

Make classic roast chicken even better by starting with seasonings under the skin and finishing with a delicious sauce from the pan juices

BY BETH DOOLEY & LUCIA WATSON

A good roast chicken will never let you down,” says my grandmother, and Lucia and I definitely agree with her. With its crisp, salty skin, moist breast meat, and dense, meaty dark meat, a whole roast chicken appeals to everyone from a sophisticated diner to a finicky kid.

Getting any two good cooks to agree on how to actually roast the chicken is another story, however. Do you use high-temperature, fast roasting? Or should you take it low and slow? Truss it tight or leave it loose? Baste? Yes? No?

We tried several methods to really explore what worked best, and while we acknowledge that there are indeed many ways to make good roast chicken, we’ve developed a method that we think is simple, yet which gives us delicious results.

We start with an initial blast of heat, followed by roasting at a moderate temperature; we don’t truss, and we don’t baste (except for small birds). We do pay careful attention to the first and last steps of the process—

we season the bird to make it even more flavorful, and we always like to go one step further than just plain roast chicken by transforming the flavorful pan juices into a simple but delicious sauce.

USE BUTTER FOR BROWNING, SEASONINGS FOR A FLAVOR BOOST

The simplicity of roast chicken is part of its appeal, so we don’t like to clutter it up with lots of ingredients and fussy steps, but we do like to give the bird a nice flavor boost before roasting. Usually we’ll just



Authors Beth Dooley and Lucia Watson collaborate on the best method for great roast chicken.

Photo at left: Ben Fink. All others: Brian Haggard.



Better, Start to Finish



Lemon Chicken with Garlic & Herbs is an example of how attention to detail before and after you roast the chicken can pay off deliciously.

Don't truss, don't baste, but do pay close attention to seasoning—and always make a sauce.

use butter and seasonings, but for a change we might marinate the whole bird.

For a basic approach, we rub the outside of the bird with softened unsalted butter, which encourages browning, and we work some butter and other seasonings under the skin of the breast to help keep it moist and to add some flavor notes to the mild meat. A generous dose of salt and pepper both outside and inside the bird's cavity is important so that the seasonings can be absorbed into the meat during roasting—more effective than trying to season the surface later.

We also usually put other flavor additions into the cavity—herbs, lemons, cloves of garlic—which help flavor the meat and especially the pan juices as they flow from the bird into the roasting pan.

DON'T TRUSS, BUT DO TRY A RACK

Trussing seems time-consuming—and a little counterproductive. Trussing keeps the drumsticks and wings close to the body so that the skin on the interior part of the breast as well as that inside the drumsticks and wings doesn't brown well. And getting the delicate



A yogurt marinade adds flavor and an appealing mahogany color to Yogurt-Marinated Roast Chicken with Wild Mushrooms.

breast meat and the denser dark meat to cook at the same rate is already an issue in roasting, and trussing can make the dark meat take even longer to cook.

We do like to use a V-shaped rack when possible, which cradles the bird and holds it up higher off the pan than a flat rack (or no rack at all). This lets the hot air circulate under the bird so that it browns entirely—no more flabby chicken skin on the back side. By lifting the chicken up, the juices hit the pan and evaporate into a rich, caramelized layer (the intensely flavorful base for your sauce), leaving the fat as a layer that can simply be poured off.

We've found that when setting the chicken on a flat rack or directly in the roasting pan, the juices that collect around the chicken never have the chance to reduce. Though flavorful, they aren't caramelized so they're not as rich tasting, and they're mixed with the fat, which makes degreasing difficult.

USE AN INITIAL SURGE OF HEAT FOR CRISPNESS WITHOUT MAKING A MESS

A blasting heat crisps the skin and gives the chicken a great roasty flavor, but we recommend just an initial 15 to 20 minutes at 450°F, followed by a more moderate 375°F for the remaining cooking time. High heat throughout cooking works, but the fat spatters a lot, making a needless mess. If the heat is too low, however, the skin never really develops that lovely crispy brown and the meat tastes too bland. As for basting, larger birds are fattier and don't need to be basted; we only baste birds that are under three pounds.

Ovens vary and so do chickens, so cooking times in the recipes should be guidelines only. You also need to consider the amount of other ingredients in the pan; for example, our yogurt-marinated chicken with mushrooms takes a little longer because you've got two pounds of mushrooms sharing the pan with the chicken. The important thing is to learn the signs of a fully cooked chicken. We don't like overdone birds, but unlike red meat, the flavor and texture of chicken don't benefit from undercooking.

Our tests for doneness start with color. The skin should be dark golden, and the juices that come from



Don't miss your chance to capture all the roast chicken flavor—in the meat, of course, but also in a sauce made from pan juices, and even in a vinaigrette made from rendered fat.

the thigh when you prick it (and also from the cavity when you tilt the whole bird) should be clear, not rosy. The drumsticks usually wiggle easily in their sockets, though it's sometimes hard to get a good grip on a hot bird. The ultimate test you should use until you're really experienced is to stick a thermometer into the middle of the thigh meat, not too close to the bone nor too close to the skin; it should read 170°F.

Hurry up and wait. The next step in roasting may seem counterintuitive: you pull your golden-brown bird hot from the oven and you want to rush it to the table. Don't. The chicken will be much better if you let it rest for 10 to 15 minutes. This lets the juices redistribute themselves. We actually prop up the chicken, backside up, to let the juices run into the breast meat. The 10-minute rest also gives you time to degrease and deglaze the pan and to finish your sauce.

CAPTURE ALL THE FLAVOR BY MAKING A SAUCE FROM THE DRIPPINGS

This is always our final step in roasting a chicken, and one that we think too many cooks overlook—making a sauce from the pan juices. The crusty bits that cling to the roasting pan are like gold: concentrated nibbins of roast chicken flavor. We pour or spoon off all the fat (don't go crazy and try to get every drop: a little residual fat won't make your sauce too greasy, and

chicken fat tastes good) and then add some liquid to the pan to melt the caramelized juices, forming a thin, shiny veil that covers the pan. We add some stock, reduce it, add a little more, and then reduce that to a silky sauce, thick enough to coat the back of the spoon. If you like, you can reduce just once, but we like the double reduction technique because it seems to create layers of more complex flavors. It's best of course to use homemade chicken stock or broth, but if you need to use canned, go for a low- or no-salt one; look for Shelton's Arrowhead Mills, or Health Valley. We also love a couple of products made by More Than Gourmet: Glace de Poulet Gold, which is a chicken "demi glace" that can be diluted to use as stock, and Fond de Poulet Gold, which is a concentrated chicken stock. Look for these products in your local market, or for more information, call 800/860-9385. You might save the carcass of the next chicken you roast, boil it for half an hour, and freeze the resulting broth to use with the next roast chicken you make.

Classic Roast Chicken with Herb Sauce & A Salad of Bitter Greens

We like to serve this basic roast chicken with a green salad dressed simply with a little of the rendered fat whisked into vinegar and mustard. *Serves four.*

3- to 5-lb. roasting chicken
2 to 3 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
½ tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
Sprigs of fresh herbs (parsley, chervil, tarragon)

FOR THE SAUCE:

¼ cup cognac or brandy
About 3½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
2 heaping Tbs. chopped mixed fresh herbs (parsley, chervil, chives, tarragon)
2 Tbs. heavy cream (optional)

FOR THE SALAD:

1 Tbs. minced shallot
1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar
1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
3 Tbs. rendered fat from the roast chicken (warm from the pan)
2 cups washed and dried mixed greens

Heat the oven to 450°F. Remove the giblets from the chicken's cavity (save for a stock if you like—but don't include the liver, which would make the stock bitter). Pull any loose fat from around the opening. Rinse the bird inside and out and pat dry. Rub the chicken all over with the softened butter, gently pushing the butter under the breast skin (see photos on p. 34). Sprinkle the outside and the cavity with the salt and pepper and stuff the herb sprigs inside.

Put the chicken, breast side up, on a V-shaped rack (or a flat rack) and set the rack in a roasting pan just larger than the rack. Roast for 15 to 20 min., reduce the heat

Choosing the best chicken for roasting

Chickens labeled "roasters" are generally older and larger (up to 5 pounds) than "broilers" or "fryers." We think roasters make the best choice because they've developed more muscle tissue and they carry a thicker layer of fat (which cooks off). Put simply, they're more flavorful.

We usually choose organic, free-range chicken when we can, and while making generalizations about them is tricky, we've noticed that the free-range chickens tend to have bigger thighs and slightly smaller breasts than regular mass-produced chickens. They also tend to be slaughtered later and so they've developed a fine layer of fat and muscle tone, all of which enrich flavor when roasting. We've found that free-range chickens tend to have a firm, not mushy, texture, and they taste more like, well, chicken.

Three steps to great roast chicken



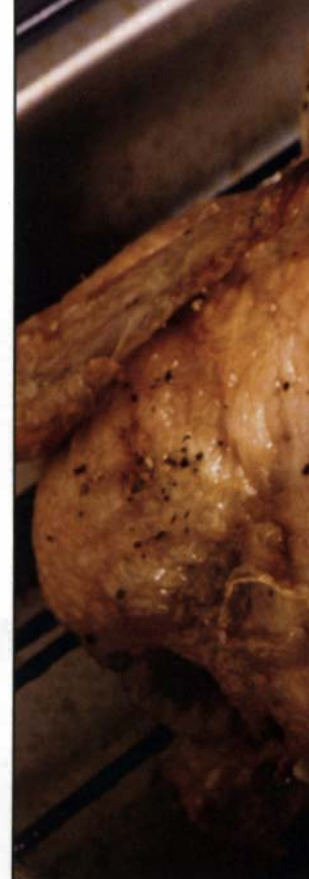
Slip your seasonings under the skin for full flavor and moist meat. Rub the chicken all over with softened butter, gently pushing the butter and other seasonings under the skin without tearing it.



Fill the cavity with flavor. Season the bird inside and out with salt and freshly ground black pepper, and stuff the cavity with herbs, lemon, mushrooms—whatever will enhance the flavor of the meat and the sauce.



Lift the bird with a rack so the skin crisps all around. A V-shaped rack is best, set in a heavy roasting pan just larger than the rack, but a flat rack is better than nothing.



to 375°F, and continue roasting for an additional 45 min. for a total of about 1 hour for a 3-lb. chicken. For larger birds, add another 10 min. for each additional pound. The chicken is done when the leg wiggles freely in its joint and when the juices run clear from the thigh when you prick it and from the cavity when you tilt the bird. A thermometer inserted into the lower meaty part of the thigh should register 170°F. Set the chicken on a warm platter, propping up the hindquarters with an inverted saucer, and tent with foil to keep it warm while you make the sauce. Remove the rack from the pan.

Make the sauce from the pan drippings, following the method in the sidebar at right. Be sure to reserve some of the fat for the vinaigrette.

To make the salad dressing, whisk together the shallot, vinegar, and mustard in a small bowl. Whisk in 3 Tbs. of the warm chicken fat, and add salt and pepper to taste. Toss with the greens and serve immediately with the carved chicken, drizzled with some sauce.

Yogurt-Marinated Roast Chicken with Wild Mushrooms

The lactose in the yogurt or *crème fraîche* marinade turns the chicken's skin a lovely mahogany brown during cooking. *Serves four.*

3- to 5-lb. roasting chicken
2 cups whole or low-fat plain yogurt (not no-fat) or crème fraîche
½ tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 lb. mushrooms (try for a mix of portabella, shiitake, cremini, and regular button), washed, trimmed, and cut into chunks if large

FOR THE SAUCE:

¼ cup dry sherry
About 3½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

One day ahead, remove the giblets from the chicken's cavity (save for a stock if you like—but don't use the liver, which would make the stock bitter). Pull any loose fat from around the opening. Rinse the bird inside and out and pat dry. Generously and completely coat the chicken with the yogurt, rubbing it inside the cavity and under the skin. Set the chicken on a plate and cover with plastic, patting it down so that it clings, or seal the chicken in a plastic bag. Refrigerate overnight.

Heat the oven to 450°F. Sprinkle the outside and the cavity of the bird with the salt and pepper. Stuff a few mushrooms into the cavity. Put the chicken, breast side up, on a V-shaped rack (or a flat rack) and set the rack in a roasting pan just larger than the rack. Scatter the rest of the mushrooms in the roasting pan. Roast for 15 to 20 min., reduce the heat to 375°F, and continue to roast for about 1 more hour for a total of about 1¼ hours for a 3-lb. chicken. For larger birds, add another 10 min. for each additional pound. The chicken is done when the leg wiggles freely in its joint and when the juices run clear from the thigh when you prick it and from the cavity when you tilt the bird. A thermometer inserted into the lower meaty part of the thigh should register 170°F. Set the chicken on a warm platter, propping up the hindquarters with an inverted saucer, and tent with foil to keep it warm while you make the sauce. Remove the rack from the pan. With a slotted spoon, remove the mushrooms and keep them warm.

Make the sauce from the pan drippings following the method in the sidebar at right. After adding the parsley, return the mushrooms to the pan, cook for a few seconds to warm them, and then taste and adjust the seasonings. Carve the chicken and serve the meat drizzled with some mushroom sauce.

A double doneness test is best. Look for clear juices and also use a thermometer. Undercooked chicken doesn't taste good, nor is it safe, so cook your bird to 170°F.



V-shaped rack (or a flat rack) and set the rack in a roasting pan just larger than the rack. Cut the zested lemon in half and squeeze both halves over the chicken. Roast for 15 to 20 min., reduce the heat to 375°F, set the garlic halves in the pan near the chicken, and continue roasting for about 45 min. more for a total of about 1 hour for a 3-lb. chicken. For larger birds, add another 10 min. for each additional pound. The chicken is done when the leg wiggles freely in its joint and when the juices run clear from the thigh when you prick it and from the cavity when you tilt the bird. A thermometer inserted into the lower meaty part of the thigh should register 170°F. Set the chicken on a warm platter, propping up the hindquarters with an inverted saucer, and tent with foil to keep it warm while you make the

Roast Lemon Chicken with Garlic & Herbs

If you don't have an open bottle of white wine to use for deglazing the pan, just use some of the lemon juice that gets squeezed over the chicken. *Serves four.*

3- to 5-lb. roasting chicken
 3 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
 Finely chopped zest of 1 lemon (reserve the lemon itself)
 ¼ cup chopped fresh mint
 ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
 (or a mix of parsley and basil)
 ½ tsp. coarse salt
 ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
 1 whole lemon (in addition to the zested lemon, above)
 2 heads garlic, cut in half crosswise
 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

FOR THE SAUCE:

¼ cup dry white wine
 About 3½ cups homemade or low-salt chicken stock
 2 Tbs. heavy cream (optional)

Heat the oven to 450°F. Remove the packet of giblets from the cavity of the chicken (and save for use in a stock if you like—but don't include the liver, which will make the stock bitter). Pull any loose fat from around the opening. Rinse the chicken inside and out, and pat dry with paper towels. Rub the outside of the chicken with about 1 Tbs. of the softened butter. Mix the remaining 2 Tbs. butter with the chopped lemon zest and herbs. Rub the butter on the inside of the cavity and under the breast skin (see photos at top left). Sprinkle the inside and outside of the bird with the salt and pepper. Pierce the whole lemon with a sharp knife and put it in the cavity of the chicken. Brush the garlic halves liberally with the olive oil and reserve.

Put the chicken, breast side up, on a

sauce. Remove the rack from the pan.

Make the sauce from the pan drippings following the method in the sidebar below. Carve the chicken and serve the meat drizzled with some sauce and with the roasted garlic on the side.

Beth Dooley is a food writer in Minneapolis. Lucia Watson is the chef-owner of Lucia's restaurant, also in Minneapolis. The two wrote *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland* (Knopf, 1995). ♦

A double reduction intensifies the sauce



Good drippings are the foundation for a good sauce. Tilt the pan and spoon off as much fat as possible. Set the pan over high heat to caramelize all the juices, but be careful not to let them burn.



Wine provides backbone and stock gives body. Deglaze with the wine, cognac, or sherry, scraping up all the drippings. Boil until the liquid is just a syrupy glaze, add about 1½ cups of the stock, and boil it down to a sputtering, bubbling glaze.



A second reduction adds layers of complex flavor. Repeat with another 1½ to 2 cups stock, boiling that down until it's reduced to about ⅔ cup sauce. Add any herbs or cream, taste, and adjust the seasoning.

Asparagus

Is Sweetest in Spring

Steam or boil it to keep its fresh, green flavor; roast or grill it to bring out its sweet, nutty side

BY SEEN LIPPERT

When I lived in Walnut Creek, California, I had a neighbor named Harold. He was 87 years old, but he still worked in his garden every day. Every June, we'd walk through his orchard together, tasting the best of the season's first offerings. What I remember most from those walks, aside from Harold's gentle disposition, was the wild asparagus that grew between the rows of pear trees. Harold and I would pick the asparagus, and he'd patiently arrange it like a bouquet of flowers for me to take home.



A bouquet of fresh asparagus. The spears last longer if the stem ends are submerged, flower-like, in water.

Now that I live in New York City, that sacred little orchard seems like a dream to me, existing only in my memory as I walk past the brownstones on my block. But even without a garden at my doorstep, I still try to cook with only what's in season.

In spring, I eagerly look forward to the sight of bunches of sweet, tender asparagus, which usually stand tall among the produce as if in salute to the new season. For the short time it's at its best, I cook and serve it all different ways, with a simple citrus vinaigrette and orange slices one night, or tossed with morels, pasta, and cream on another.

FOR THE BEST FLAVOR, IGNORE SIZE AND LOOK FOR FRESHNESS

Here in the United States, asparagus is usually green, though you might see pretty purple spears at farmers' markets. In Europe, soil is often mounded around the spears as they grow, keeping the shoots from direct sunlight, which results in white spears touched with a hint of purple. The taste of all three varieties is similar, but purple (which turns green when cooked) tends to be a little sweeter.

Many people think that thin asparagus is the most tender. But the truth is that asparagus of any size can be sweet and tender as long as it's fresh. Look for pencil-thin asparagus early in the spring, and fatter, succulent spears as the season progresses.

Seen Lippert cools asparagus by laying it on a towel. "I never chill vegetables in ice water—it leaches out flavor."

Check the bottom of the spears for age. When shopping for asparagus, choose firm stalks with tightly closed buds at the tip. The color should be vivid





with no signs of fading. Asparagus begins to lose its sweetness the moment it's cut. Check the stem ends for freshness: the best asparagus looks freshly cut and not at all dried out.

Store asparagus in water and use it soon. Asparagus lasts longest if its stem ends are submerged in water (another good sign to look for when shopping). I like to treat asparagus like flowers and refrigerate the spears in a glass with half an inch of water. Cook the asparagus within two days for the best flavor.

To prepare spears for cooking, grasp at either end and snap. The stalk will break naturally at the point where it starts to get tough and stringy. Use the fibrous ends for stock or for your compost pile. If the asparagus is thick-skinned or fibrous (take a small bite to test), peel the spears from just under the head to the stem end.

STEAM TO PRESERVE ITS FRESH FLAVOR, ROAST TO INTENSIFY ITS SWEETNESS

From March through May, I eat a lot of asparagus, yet I never tire of it because I change its personality with different cooking methods. Steaming and boiling preserve asparagus's grassy freshness and are great ways to cook it for cold salads. Sautéing and stir-frying are quick ways to cook thin slices, while roasting and grilling whole spears intensify their sweetness. I love the caramelized flavor of roasted asparagus, which just begs for a squeeze of lemon and some shaved Parmesan.

Boiling lets you add a dash of flavor. When boiling asparagus, be sure to salt the water: use about 2 tablespoons of salt for 5 quarts of water. I boil asparagus uncovered so I can easily check it for doneness. I sometimes infuse the water with flavor by simmering a head of garlic with the top sliced off, three bay leaves, and a shallot for 10 minutes, scooping them all out, and then cooking the asparagus in the water.

Steaming is great for just a few spears. Lay the spears in a single layer in a steaming rack over water, cover the pot, and cook until just tender.

Sautéing adds a golden, crisp edge. I usually slice my asparagus quite thin on the diagonal when I'm sautéing it so it cooks up tenderly in just a few minutes. Asparagus is especially delicious sautéed in butter or fruity olive oil. A tasty, unexpected way to serve asparagus is fried until golden brown and a little crispy.

Grilling pairs smoky and sweet flavors. To grill asparagus, brush it with olive oil, salt it lightly, and grill it over medium-low heat, turning it often. It's done when tender and marked with browned,



A citrus vinaigrette and sliced oranges turn plain boiled asparagus into a beautiful, flavorful salad. Don't dress the salad ahead of serving; acids turn bright-green asparagus drab and dull.



Asparagus and morels—delicious signs of spring. Earthy morels are a wonderful counterpoint to grassy asparagus in this creamy pasta dish.



An asparagus bread pudding is a perfect dish for brunch. Simply toss all the ingredients together before baking.

caramelized spots where it was in contact with the grill. If you parboil the spears for a minute before grilling, you can raise the heat and cook them more quickly without worrying about burning the outside before the inside is tender.

Roasting makes asparagus nutty and sweet. Simply spread the spears on a baking sheet, lightly brush them with olive oil, and sprinkle them with salt. Stick them in a 400°F oven and take them out when tender, usually in 10 to 12 minutes. Serve them hot or at room temperature.

Cooking time depends on the thickness and tenderness of the spears, on how crowded your pot or pan is, and on how you like your asparagus. I don't like it to crunch when I eat it, but overcooked, mushy asparagus is even more offensive. I start testing after a few minutes by piercing the end with a knife or taking a bite. I consider it done when it's barely tender and the knife meets slight resistance. Keep in mind that asparagus will cook further with residual heat once it's out of the pot or off the grill.

I never shock asparagus (or any vegetable) after cooking. Plunging it into ice water after cooking leaches out vitamins as well as flavor. Instead, I cool the spears in a single layer at room temperature.

Linguine with Asparagus, Morels & Cream

If you can't find fresh morels, use dried. Chanterelles also taste great in this dish. *Serves two.*

3 oz. fresh morel mushrooms, wiped clean, or 1 oz. dried morels, reconstituted in 2 cups of hot water, drained (strain and reserve the liquid), and patted dry
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 small shallot, finely chopped (about 1 Tbs.)
1 lb. asparagus, trimmed and cut on the diagonal into 1½-inch slices
1¼ cups heavy cream
2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
6 oz. linguine or fettuccine
3 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano



Try asparagus in four spur-of-the-moment, delicious dishes

- ◆ **Make a tortino**—an omelet that's more asparagus than egg. Sauté ¼ pound thinly sliced asparagus in butter in an 8-inch nonstick pan until just tender. Pour an egg beaten with a little cream over the asparagus and cook just until the egg has set.
- ◆ **Serve roasted or grilled asparagus** with a drizzle of olive oil, a squeeze of lemon, and a few shavings of Parmesan.



A perfectly easy dinner for one. Sautéed asparagus is bound with an egg and a bit of cream.

- ◆ **Dress boiled asparagus** with brown butter, bacon, capers, and lemon juice. A sieved hard-cooked egg and an anchovy or two are great additions, too.
- ◆ **Fry asparagus with julienned ginger** for a side dish that sings. Sauté the ginger over high heat in a little oil until crisp and golden brown. Add the asparagus, cook until tender, and drain any excess oil.



Wine Choices

Asparagus needs wines with herbaceous or fruity notes

When it comes to pairing wine, asparagus (along with some other green vegetables) suffers a reputation as a "problem food" because it can make the wine taste grassy and sometimes even bitter. Grassy flavors are no problem if you like them: just serve a naturally herbaceous-tasting wine like Sauvignon Blanc to make the connection. Caymus and Grgich Hills, both Californian, are good choices.

But if you'd rather tone down the

green flavors, look for wines that are fruity, especially for recipes that contain fruit. Whites and reds can both work, depending on the dish's other ingredients. Avoid those with heavy oak or tannin, or both—especially big Chardonnays and full-bodied reds—since vegetables can give these wines a rough, gritty texture. For the salad—wine-friendly because of its citrusy (rather than vinegary) dressing—try a lively Alsace white like "Gentil" from

Hugel, a fruity-floral blend of several traditional varietals.

For the bread pudding and the morels with cream and pasta, reach for red. Light, inexpensive Pinot Noirs like Napa Ridge or Lindeman's from Australia nicely pick up on the earthy flavors. Or try Masi's smooth Bardolino Classico.

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine pairing in San Francisco's Bay Area.

If the morels are large, cut them in half lengthwise. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook for about 1 min. Add the morels and cook, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 10 min. (If using dried morels, boil the strained soaking liquid until reduced to ¼ cup. Strain the liquid through a coffee filter and add it with the asparagus and cream for even more flavor.) Add the asparagus, cream, and thyme and simmer until the asparagus is just tender and the sauce is slightly thickened, about 5 min. Season generously with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta until *al dente*, drain it, and toss it with the asparagus and morels. Add the cheese and toss to coat the pasta. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

Asparagus Bread Pudding

This dish was inspired by a recipe that Georgeanne Brennan brought back from France and shared with her friends at Chez Panisse. You can play around with it by trying different cheeses and even substituting other vegetables when asparagus isn't at its peak. *Serves eight.*

2 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 Tbs. water
Pinch salt
1 lb. (2 small) leeks, cleaned and cut into ½-inch thick slices (white and light green parts only)
5 eggs
2½ cups milk
1 cup heavy cream
1 lb. asparagus, trimmed and cut on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces
1 lb. dry bread, cut into 1-inch cubes (if fresh, toast lightly)
¼ lb. Fontina cheese, shredded
¼ lb. Gruyère or Cantal cheese, shredded
½ cup mixed chopped fresh herbs (chives, parsley, tarragon, chervil)
½ tsp. grated lemon zest
Pinch cayenne
1 tsp. salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a medium skillet over medium heat, melt the butter with the water and a pinch of salt. Add the leeks and cook until tender, about 10 min. Set aside to cool. In a large bowl, whisk

together the eggs and milk. Add the remaining ingredients, including the leeks, and gently toss them. The mixture should be well coated and somewhat soupy.

Spread the mixture into a 4-quart soufflé dish, a 13x9-inch baking dish, or another ovenproof dish that's at least 2 inches deep and big enough to hold the mixture. Put the dish on a baking sheet and bake until the top is crusty brown and a knife inserted in the middle comes out clean, 45 to 60 min. If the pudding looks too dark before it's finished, cover with foil. Let cool slightly before serving.

Asparagus & Citrus Salad

This bright and simple salad tastes best with a good, fruity olive oil and true balsamic vinegar. *Serves four.*

2 Tbs. finely chopped shallot
1 Tbs. good-quality balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. sherry vinegar
3 oranges, preferably blood oranges
1½ lb. asparagus, trimmed
2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper to taste (optional)

In a small bowl, combine the shallots with the vinegars and let the shallots macerate at least 20 min. Meanwhile, zest 1 of the oranges (avoid the white pith). Finely chop the zest and add it to the shallots. Juice the zested orange to yield about ⅓ cup and add the juice to the shallots and vinegar. Slowly pour in the olive oil, stirring to mix.

Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add the asparagus and simmer until just tender, about 5 min. Drain and spread the spears on paper towels to cool.

Cut off the ends of the remaining 2 oranges and peel them by running a sharp knife down the fruit vertically, following the contours. Slice the peeled orange horizontally into ¼-inch slices. Just before serving, toss the cooled asparagus with the vinaigrette. Arrange the spears and the orange slices on salad plates. Sprinkle with pepper, if you like, and serve immediately.

Seen Lippert is the executive chef at Across the Street restaurant in Manhattan. ♦

An easy way to trim asparagus. Snap the asparagus with two hands; the tough part should break right off. For a cleaner look and less waste, you can cut off the tough bottoms with a knife and peel the bottom half of the stalk if necessary.

***Creamy, sumptuous
risotto is as easy to
make as it is delicious.
Here it's laced with a
purée of fresh spinach
and herbs.***



RISOTTO

Elegant Comfort Food

Italy's famed rice dish cooks up in only twenty minutes and—surprise—doesn't need constant stirring

BY ALAN TARDI

Before I went to work at a restaurant in Italy, I had heard of risotto, but I didn't really know what it was. Quite soon into my apprenticeship, though, I learned. I noticed Yolanda, the head cook, returning frequently to a simmering pot on the stove. "Cosa fai?" I asked. "Risotto!" she snapped back, annoyed at so obvious a question. Yolanda finished the risotto with a spoonful of grated Parmigiano, ladled a taste into a bowl, and set it before me with a brusque "Dai, mangia!" I had never tasted anything like it.

And there isn't anything quite like risotto, a creamy, luxurious rice dish that you get by toasting hard-grained rice in a little butter, stirring in chopped vegetables and other ingredients, and adding hot stock bit by bit, cooking slowly until the rice is *al dente*. Risotto's consistency can vary from

something resembling a thick soup to a creamy porridge. It can be as simple as rice, white wine, stock, and a little Parmesan cheese stirred in at the end, or more elaborate, studded with vegetables, seafood, or meat. Once you've mastered the basic technique, you can make an endless variety of risotti.

RISOTTO NEEDS A HIGH-STARCH RICE AND A HEAVY POT

There are no shortcuts to risotto (and if anyone ever comes out with an instant version, don't buy it). Real risotto needs gradual cooking and the right rice.

Use rice labeled *arborio superfino*, *vialone nano*, or *carnaroli*. All three are plump grains with a high starch content, which is what gives risotto its characteristic chewiness and creaminess. Arborio is easiest



Risotto of Sweet Italian Sausage & Broccoli Raab is an easy, hearty dinner that cooks up fast.



Wild Mushroom Risotto gets its deep flavor from a combination of dried and fresh mushrooms.



Toast the rice. Melt the butter and add the rice. Turn the heat to high, stirring constantly until the rice just begins to pop, about 1 minute. It should not color.

to find, and I think the easiest to work with. Vialone nano is starchier and makes a denser, creamier risotto, but it goes from *al dente* to overcooked in a flash. Carnaroli is the hardest of the three and takes the longest to cook. It's the best choice if you must cook risotto ahead of time, the way many restaurants do.

Choose a heavy pan with a nonreactive lining.

A thick bottom and sides help distribute the heat evenly and prevent burning; I often use an All-Clad pot. A stainless-steel, anodized-aluminum, or enameled interior won't react with high-acid ingredients such as white wine or tomato, which can turn gray in aluminum or unlined cast-iron pans.

A wooden spoon works best for stirring risotto. It's gentler on the rice than a metal spoon, and it won't scratch the inside of your pan.

FIRST STEPS LAY DOWN LAYERS OF FLAVOR AND ENSURE CREAMY TEXTURE

While some risotto recipes begin with a sauté of aromatic vegetables (known as a *soffrito*), into which you stir the raw rice, I prefer to start off with the rice.

Toasting the rice in melted butter keeps it from getting mushy. This brief step is very important. It creates a shell around each grain, allowing the grain to slowly absorb moisture without getting soggy or bursting open like a kernel of pop-



Add the vegetables. Sauté until soft and just translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the wine if the recipe calls for it and cook until the liquid has almost disappeared, about 2 minutes.

corn. You'll end up with a risotto that's creamy, but where each grain maintains its own shape, rather than being mushy.

Add the chopped vegetables for a sweet, mellow flavor. Adding onion or garlic early, along with any other raw ingredients that require lengthy cooking (such as sausage or mushrooms), ensures that both their flavor and texture will blend well with the rice.

White wine adds a touch of acidity and deepens flavor.

It's important to add the wine before the stock, because direct contact with the bottom of the hot pot will help burn off the alcohol, leaving only the wine's subtler flavor. A

simple, dry wine works best; avoid those that are woody or sweet. While the recipes here use white wine, there's another whole group of risotti that depend on red wine.

HOT STOCK IS THE KEY TO CREAMY RISOTTO

What sets risotto apart from all other rice dishes is that it's not just rice mixed with other ingredients, but a perfect marriage of the two. Hot stock serves as the melding agent, releasing the rice's starch and making it creamy.

Use aromatic, unsalted stock. The stock should not be too concentrated or flavorful. During cooking,

Toasting the rice
is a critical step—
it keeps the risotto
from getting mushy.



"I wouldn't suggest taking the dog for a walk, but once you add the first bit of stock to the risotto, you're free to make a drink, turn on the news, toss a salad," says Alan Tardi.

you'll reduce the stock to just a few tablespoons, which will intensify its flavors and the flavors of any added seasonings, especially salt. If you taste the stock and you want to eat more, it's too concentrated and will overpower the risotto. I prefer using homemade stock, but if you must use canned, make it low-sodium. (*Editors' note:* In our test kitchen, we had good results with College Inn low-sodium broth.)

The stock must be simmering. Adding hot stock is the only way that the rice will cook thoroughly. Hot stock keeps the temperature at a more constant level, ensuring even, continuous cooking.

Add the stock in small batches. Rice loves to soak up liquid; it's the gradual addition of stock and slow cooking that gives you the creamy result unique to great risotto. Adding all the cooking liquid at once would be more like boiling or steam-

ing the rice—which is okay, but it's not risotto.

CONSTANT STIRRING ISN'T NEEDED

I've heard people swear that you have to stir the risotto in the same direction without stopping or it will be ruined, and that constant stirring releases more of the rice's starch. I've found neither to be true. In fact, risotto doesn't need constant attention during its twenty-minute cooking time. You'll just need to check on the pan every few minutes, give the rice a stir to keep it from sticking, and add more stock.

To test for doneness, take a bite. When the rice is cooked, it will have just about doubled in



Add hot stock. When the pan looks this dry, it's time to ladle in just enough stock to cover the rice.

Don't flood the pan. Add just enough stock to cover the rice. Be sure to give the pot an occasional stir, checking every 3 or 4 minutes and adding more stock when the liquid is gone.



volume. Each grain will be plumped but not broken open. Take one grain and bite it in half; it should be chewy and resilient. Look at the other half. If there's a tiny white pin-dot in the very center of the grain, it means that the risotto has the proper *al dente* quality.

Use a "shake test" to check for proper consistency. The other trick to checking risotto for doneness is making sure that it isn't too soupy or too porridgy. There are two schools of taste here: some prefer a looser, liquidy risotto; I like a thicker one.

After the risotto is cooked, you stir in more butter (if the recipe calls for it) and Parmigiano-Reggiano, taste for seasoning, and if you like, you can add more salt and a touch more stock.

To test the consistency, spoon a little into a bowl and shake it lightly from side to side. The risotto should spread out very gently of its own accord. If the rice just stands still, it's too dry, so add a little more stock. If a puddle of liquid forms around the rice, you've added too much stock. Spoon some liquid off, or just let the risotto sit for a few more seconds off the heat to absorb the excess stock.

Wild Mushroom Risotto

A little drizzle of white truffle oil right before serving is delicious. For a very intense mushroom flavor, use mushroom liquor instead of chicken stock: simmer 2 ounces dried porcini in 5 cups of water for 5 minutes; let sit 30 minutes off the heat and strain, reserving the mushrooms. Serves two as a main course.

3 cups chicken stock; more if needed
1 oz. dried porcini soaked for 30 minutes
in 1 cup warm water; mushrooms
chopped, soaking liquid strained and
reserved
4 Tbs. butter
¾ cup arborio rice
2 cups assorted fresh wild mushrooms,
cleaned, trimmed, and coarsely chopped



Turn off the heat and give a vigorous stir. This stirring helps release the starch in the rice that makes risotto creamy. Stir in the cheese (and butter, if the recipe calls for it).

⅔ cup dry white wine
Salt to taste
¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Heat the chicken stock along with the reserved strained porcini soaking liquid; lower the heat to a simmer. In a medium, heavy-gauge saucepan over medium-high heat, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter. Stir in the rice, toasting just until it starts to sizzle and pop, about 1 min. It should not color. Stir the porcini and the fresh mushrooms into the rice. Stir in the wine. When almost all the liquid has disappeared, after about 2 min., add just enough hot stock to cover the rice. Lower the heat to maintain a vigorous simmer; stir occasionally. When the stock is almost gone, add enough to cover the rice, along with a pinch of salt. Check on the risotto every

3 or 4 min., giving it an occasional stir to make sure it isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan and adding just enough stock to cover the rice when the liquid has almost disappeared. Continue this way until the rice is just *al dente*, about 20 min. total cooking time. Bite into a grain; you should see a white pin-dot in the center. Take the

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making risotto on *Fine Cooking's* web site.
<http://www.taunton.com/fc/>

risotto off the heat. Add the remaining 2 Tbs. butter; stir vigorously for a few seconds. Add the parsley, cheese, and more salt, if needed. The risotto should be moist and creamy, not runny. Stir in more stock to loosen the risotto, if you like. Serve immediately.

Spinach & Herb Risotto

This makes a generous amount of pesto, so use half and freeze the rest for the next time you make risotto. *Serves two as a main course.*

FOR THE SPINACH & HERB PESTO:

*¾ cup densely packed stemmed spinach leaves
¼ cup mixed flat-leaf parsley, cilantro, and tarragon leaves
¼ cup chicken stock, as needed*

FOR THE RISOTTO:

*3 cups chicken or vegetable stock; more if needed
3 Tbs. butter
1 cup arborio rice
½ cup diced onion
½ cup dry white wine
Salt to taste
2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano*



Finally, stir in any additional flavorings, like this spinach and herb pesto, which gives the risotto a fresh, springtime flavor.

Prepare the spinach and herb pesto—Put the spinach and herbs in a food processor or a blender. Process, adding a little stock to loosen if needed, until well combined. The pesto should resemble a very thick soup. Set aside.

Make the risotto—Bring the stock to a boil; reduce to a simmer. In a medium, heavy-gauge saucepan over medium-high heat, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter. Stir in the rice, toasting just until it starts to sizzle and pop, about 1 min. It should not color. Add the onion, stirring constantly, and cook until translucent, 1 to 2 min. Stir in the wine. When almost all the liquid has disappeared, after about 1 min., add just enough hot stock to cover the rice. Lower the heat to maintain a vigorous simmer; stir occasionally. When the stock is almost gone, again add enough stock to cover the rice, along with a pinch of

salt. Check the risotto every 3 or 4 min., giving an occasional stir to make sure it isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan, adding just enough stock to cover the rice when the liquid has almost disappeared. Continue this way until the rice is just *al dente*, about 20 min. total cooking time. Bite into a grain; you should see a white pin-dot in the center. Take the risotto off the heat. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. butter. Stir in half of the herb pesto (freeze the rest for another time) and the cheese. Stir vigorously for a few seconds. The risotto should be moist and creamy, not runny. Add more stock to loosen the risotto if you like, and more salt to taste, if needed. Serve immediately.

Risotto of Sweet Sausage & Broccoli Raab

Use the mildest sausage you can find. *Serves two as a main course.*

*3 cups chicken stock; more if needed
2 Tbs. butter*

*½ cup arborio rice
¼ lb. sweet Italian sausage, skinned and crumbled
1 small clove garlic, chopped
½ cup dry white wine*

Salt to taste

Pinch cayenne

¼ lb. broccoli raab, boiled for 5 min., drained, squeezed dry, and coarsely chopped

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Bring the stock to a boil; lower the heat to a simmer. In a large, heavy-gauge saucepan over medium-high heat, melt the butter. Stir in the rice, toasting just until it starts to sizzle and pop, about 1 min. It should not color. Add the sausage and garlic. Stir, breaking up the meat into small bits, until the sausage has lost its pink color, about 1 min. Pour in the wine. Stir occasionally, cooking until the liquid is almost gone, about 2 min. Add just enough hot stock to cover the rice. Lower the heat to maintain a vigorous simmer; stir occasionally. When the liquid is almost gone, add just enough hot stock to cover the rice, along with a pinch of salt and cayenne. Check the risotto every 3 or 4 min. giving it an occasional stir to make sure it isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan and adding just enough stock to cover the rice when the liquid has almost disappeared. After a couple of additions of stock, add the broccoli raab. Continue adding stock and checking until the rice is just *al dente*, about 20 min. total cooking time. Bite into a grain; you should see a small white pin-dot in the center. Take the risotto off the heat and stir vigorously for a few seconds. Fold in the pepper, cheese, and a pinch of salt if needed. Stir in a few tablespoons of stock to loosen the risotto, if you like. Serve immediately.

Alan Tardi is the chef-owner of Follonico restaurant in Manhattan, where risotto is always on the menu. ♦

Delicious uses for leftover risotto

Risotto is at its best served immediately.

But if you happen to have some left over, here are some delicious ways to use it.

♦ Make fried rice balls (*arancine*) by molding risotto into golfball-size pieces. Poke a hole in the ball and fill it with chopped meat or cheese. Seal the hole with rice, roll the rice ball in beaten egg, toss it in flour, and fry.

♦ Make rice cakes (*tortine de riso*) by shaping flat cakes about ¾ inch thick. Warm some olive oil in a pan and sauté the cakes until golden brown on both sides. Drain any excess oil. Serve as a side dish or a light lunch.

♦ Thicken soups or broth with leftover risotto.

A Foolproof Way to Make Luscious, Light Lemon Curd

Creaming the ingredients before heating results in a satiny, “uncurdled” curd, perfect for tarts, cakes, and cookies, or simply enjoy it on toast

BY ELINOR KLIVANS

Lemon curd is so delicious, so luscious, and so versatile that I’m sure it’s what all good lemons aspire to be when they grow up. We can thank the English for this bright yellow curd with its tart, vibrant flavor, as well as for the wonderful notion of spreading it on scones hot out of the oven.

Made by gently cooking a mixture of fresh lemon juice, sugar, butter, and eggs until thickened, lemon curd is also divine on buttered toast, a simple and perfect way to appreciate the curd’s cool, satiny texture. It makes an easy and delicious filling for tarts, cakes, and cookies. And a dollop of lemon curd tastes delicious with a piece of gingerbread or a slice of pound cake; its tart lemon flavor counters the spiciness of the former and the sweet richness of the latter. Pair it with a piece of the thick Scottish shortbread shown here and you’ll appreciate how lemon curd can transform a simple, somewhat homely cookie into something wonderful.

A FOOLPROOF METHOD MAKES THE SMOOTHEST LEMON CURD

Lemon curd is easy to prepare, except for one pesky problem: it sometimes winds up with bits of cooked and curdled egg. This problem is especially common in curds that use whole eggs as well as egg yolks. Because the eggs whites cook at a lower temperature,

they’re more prone to coagulation. These cooked bits don’t ruin the flavor of the curd, but a smooth texture will require careful straining, and quite a bit of the mixture can get lost in the process. It’s also rather alarming, especially for the uninitiated, to see those white lumps form during cooking.

For years I tried to find a method that eliminated the need for straining the curd. I tried cooking the sauce in a double boiler, cooking it in a heavy saucepan, adding some of the hot liquid to the eggs to temper them, whisking the mixture, using more eggs, using fewer eggs. I thought of eliminating the whole eggs altogether and using just the yolks as some cooks do (since the whites are more troublesome), but I prefer the lighter, almost custardy results I get from using whole eggs. When I finally found the answer, it wasn’t in my kitchen. It was at my hair salon.

I was getting my hair cut when my hairdresser, Mary Jane, told me that when she made my recipe for lemon curd, it didn’t need any straining. There were none of the cooked egg-white particles I had warned her about. As she cut my hair, we went over how she made the curd. By the time we were finished, I had a new recipe for lemon curd as well as a new haircut.

Instead of simply combining the ingredients in the pan on the stove as most lemon curd recipes call



Beating the eggs with the butter and sugar makes the curd especially smooth. This method eliminates the small bits of cooked egg that usually require straining.



Don't panic at the curdled appearance at this stage—it will become satiny-smooth soon as it cooks. Be patient and wait for the butter to melt.



An easy test for doneness. The curd is cooked when it reaches 170°F, but you can see that it's cooked when your finger leaves a clear path on the back of a spoon. The curd will continue to thicken as it cools.

for, Mary Jane mixed the ingredients as if she were making a cake. She creamed the butter and sugar until fluffy, beat in the eggs slowly, and only then did she add the lemon juice. I'm not quite sure why this method works so well (see "The scientific secrets," p. 54), but it works every time: the curd thickens properly, becomes satiny-smooth, and there's not one drop of cooked egg to strain.

A FEW TIPS FOR BEST RESULTS

With the right utensils and technique, you can make perfect lemon curd every time.

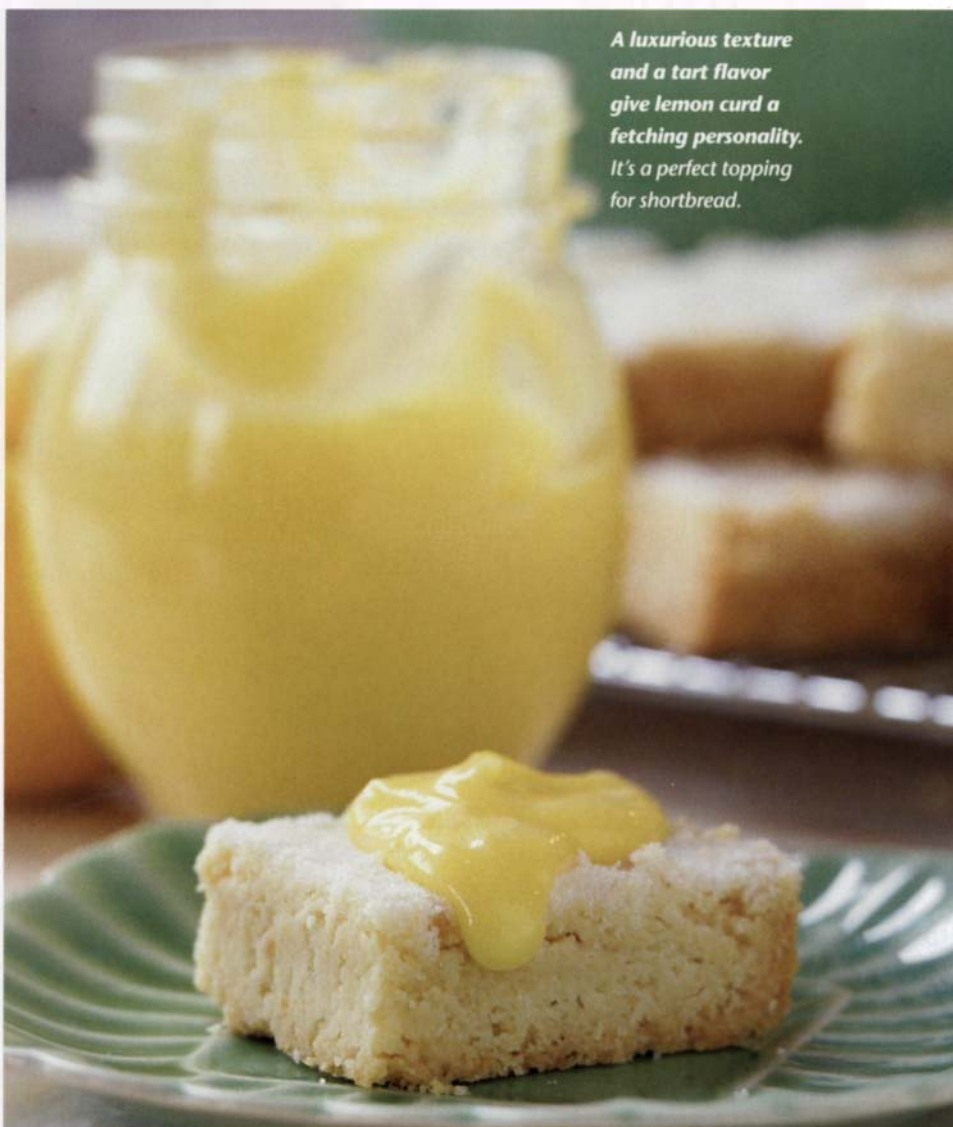
♦ **Use a heavy-based, nonreactive saucepan.** Stainless steel, anodized aluminum, and enamel all work well. Some materials, such as plain aluminum or unlined copper, will react with the acid in the lemons, discoloring the curd and giving it a metallic flavor.

♦ **Stir the sauce often to keep it creamy and to prevent burning.** Stirring the mixture keeps the protein molecules in the eggs from bonding too tightly, resulting in a creamy, rather than solid, curd. Be sure to scrape the spoon along the seam where the bottom and the sides of the pot meet—an area prone to burning.

♦ **Don't let the curd boil.** Boiling can cause the curd to curdle. Take your time and keep the heat moderate. Eventually the curd will thicken to the proper consistency (as shown in the photo at top right). For a double recipe, use a large saucepan and allow for additional cooking time.

LEMON CURD KEEPS FOR A WEEK IN THE FRIDGE, MONTHS IN THE FREEZER

Tightly covered, lemon curd will last about a week in the refrigerator. Because I always like to have



A luxurious texture and a tart flavor give lemon curd a fetching personality. It's a perfect topping for shortbread.

some lemon curd on hand, I often make a batch and freeze it; it will last for months tightly covered in the freezer. It doesn't freeze solid, which means you can spoon out exactly what you need when you need it.

Finally, though lemon curd is my favorite, I also enjoy curd made from limes, which make a soft cream-colored curd with flecks of green zest.

The scientific secrets to the method

Why does this method for making lemon curd work so well? Successful lemon curd is the result of battling forces that encourage and discourage the eggs to coagulate. You want the eggs to thicken—but not too much, and not too soon.

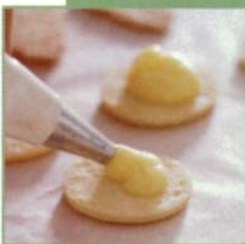
Heat encourages the proteins in eggs to bond, as does the addition of acidic ingredients. Diluting the eggs raises the temperature at which coagulation begins simply because it keeps the protein molecules in the eggs physically farther apart. Sugar is an especially good barrier. According to food scientist Harold McGee, one tablespoon of sugar is enough to surround each protein molecule in a large egg with a

screen of several thousand sucrose molecules.

But many recipes for lemon curd begin by beating the eggs with the sugar. What sets this one apart is the early addition of the fat. "What we could have here is that the butter is coating the protein molecules pretty well," says food scientist and *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Shirley O. Corriher. The coating of fat helps protect the eggs from the acid in the lemon juice.

The electric mixer gives you further insurance, adds Corriher. The vigorous beating denatures the proteins in the eggs, partially "cooking" or tempering them so that they won't curdle as easily when heated.

Five great ways to enjoy lemon curd



◆ **Make pretty sandwich cookies using lemon curd.** Macarons, butter cookies, and nut wafers all taste great with lemon curd

spread between them.

◆ **Swirl lemon curd into cheesecake.** Spoon a cup of room-temperature lemon curd in drops over an unbaked cheesecake. Use a butter knife to cut the curd into the cake to marbleize it before baking according to your recipe.

◆ **Fill tiny tarts with lemon curd.** Bake your favorite butter pastry in mini muffin tins. Fill the baked tart shells with cold lemon curd and top with berries and cream. You can also bake the filled

tarts for 15 minutes in a 325°F oven. Baking the curd firms the custard and gives it a deep golden color. These, too, may be topped with whipped cream or a light dusting of confectioners' sugar.

◆ **Spread lemon curd between the layers of a cake.** For a double lemon flavor, top the cake with a fluffy icing made by beating a cup of cream and a teaspoon of vanilla extract until the cream begins to thicken and then beating in a cup of cold lemon curd until the cream forms soft peaks.

◆ **Make a pretty lemon parfait.** In a clear dessert bowl or glass, alternate layers of frozen lemon curd with the whipped cream and lemon curd mixture described above. Or substitute vanilla ice cream for the cream-curd mixture to make a lemon curd sundae.

Lemon Curd

Seeing a jar of lovely yellow lemon curd in the refrigerator will brighten anyone's day. *Yields about 2 cups.*

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1 cup sugar
2 large eggs
2 large egg yolks
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. grated lemon zest

In a large bowl, beat the butter and sugar with an electric mixer, about 2 min. Slowly add the eggs and yolks. Beat for 1 min. Mix in the lemon juice. The mixture will look curdled, but it will smooth out as it cooks.

In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, cook the mixture over low heat until it looks smooth. (The curdled appearance disappears as the butter in the mixture melts.) Increase the heat to medium and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens, about 15 min. It should leave a path on the back of a spoon and will read 170°F on a thermometer. Don't let the mixture boil.

Remove the curd from the heat; stir in the lemon zest. Transfer the curd to a bowl. Press plastic wrap on the surface of the lemon curd to keep a skin from forming and chill the curd in the refrigerator. The curd will thicken further as it cools. Covered tightly, it will keep in the refrigerator for a week and in the freezer for 2 months.

VARIATION:

For lime curd, substitute fresh lime juice and zest for lemon.

Thick Scottish Shortbread

Superfine sugar helps give these treats their delicate texture. If you can't find it, pulse granulated sugar in a food processor for about 30 seconds. *Yields 12 squares.*

6 oz. (1½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
3½ oz. (¾ cup) cornstarch
 $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus 2 Tbs. superfine sugar
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature for 1 hour and cut into 16 pieces
1 tsp. vanilla extract

Position a rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 300°F. Line an 8x8-inch brownie pan with heavy aluminum foil, letting the foil extend over two sides of the pan.

Sift the flour, cornstarch, and salt into a large bowl. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the superfine sugar and, with an electric mixer on low speed, mix to just blend the ingredients. Add the butter pieces and vanilla and mix until large ($\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch) crumbs form, about 2 min. Very gently press the dough evenly into the prepared pan. Don't pack the dough into the pan. Bake until the top of the shortbread just begins to turn golden, about 1 hour and 10 min. Remove from the oven and immediately sprinkle the remaining 2 Tbs. superfine sugar over the top. Cut the shortbread into 12 squares, being sure to cut through to the bottom. Cool completely before lifting the foil and shortbread from the pan.

*Elinor Klivans teaches baking across the country. Her latest book is *Bake & Freeze Chocolate Desserts* (Broadway Books, 1997). ◆*

Pros Pick the Best Baking Sheets

Top chefs choose their favorite pans for making everything from delicate cookies to crisp pizza

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON

Thwaaang—that's the sound of your flimsy cookie sheet warping in the oven. You know, that thin little piece of metal that only fits about eight cookies on it, never really seems to get clean, and does that ridiculous dance in the oven if the temperature goes over 350°F. It's time you recycled that cookie sheet into a tray for your potted plants. With plenty of good-quality, affordable baking sheets on the market, it's easy to upgrade. You'll get more even results from your baking and roasting, and you'll boost your cooking confidence in the process.

After I began working in restaurants, one of the first additions I made to my home kitchen was a short stack of heavy-duty half sheet pans (so called because they're half the size of the "full sheet" pans restaurants use for bulk baking). I started to use these rimmed 13x18-inch nonwarping aluminum pans for just about everything that went into the oven—from cookies or focaccia to stuffed pork loin or a potato galette. Soon I found myself buying more of these (for about \$11 each) for friends and relatives who were still struggling with flimsy cookie sheets. Because of my sheet-pan fetish, I decided to ask professional bakers about their favorite baking sheets.

HEAVY, RIMMED ALUMINUM BAKING SHEETS ARE ALL-AROUND FAVORITES

Overwhelmingly, the baking pros I spoke with across the country advised cooks to buy heavy, durable, aluminum, rimmed baking sheets (read: half sheet pans). "When you're in a store, pick up a baking



sheet and see how heavy it is," said Nancy Silverton, cookbook author, pastry chef, and owner of La Brea Bakery. "Try to find heavy-duty, restaurant-quality aluminum sheet pans with a lip around them. And whatever you do, don't go near the supermarket," said Silverton. "It's a false savings to buy inexpensive baking sheets, because they start warping [at temperatures] over 300°F."

Nick Malgieri, author of *How to Bake* and director of the pastry program of Peter Kump's Cooking School in New York, told me he loves the aluminum half sheet pans. "I use them at home, I use them at work,

A heavy-duty aluminum baking sheet like this one can be used for just about everything that goes in the oven, from a batch of biscuits or cookies to a loaf of bread or a rolled roast.



Ten baking sheets to look for

Here's the author's opinionated list of the best baking sheets on the market, listed according to versatility. If you want one new all-purpose baking sheet, buy no. 1. If you plan to upstage Flo Braker for the number of baked goods produced in one home kitchen, go for all ten.

1 Double-thick aluminum half sheet pan, various manufacturers, 13x18 inches, rolled edges, \$11 to \$15. King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue, Bridge Kitchenware.

2 Aluminum-coated steel professional baking sheet, by Chicago Metallic for Williams-Sonoma, 13x18 inches, rolled edges, \$15. Williams-Sonoma.

3 Double-thick aluminum quarter sheet pan, various manufacturers, 9½x12½ inches, rolled edges, \$9.50. King Arthur, Broadway Panhandler.

4 Heavy-gauge professional aluminum baking sheet, made by Vollrath of extra-durable aluminum alloy, 14x18 inches, \$19.95. Bridge Kitchenware, Broadway Panhandler.

5 Heavy-duty aluminum cookie sheet, by Magic Line, 12x15 inches (\$16), 15x18 inches (\$18), 1-inch lip on one end. La Cuisine.

6 French black steel sheet pan, by Matfer, 11x15 inches, flared ½-inch rim on all sides, \$20 to \$23. Bridge Kitchenware, La Cuisine, Broadway Panhandler.

7 Belgian blue steel cookie sheet, by Isabelle Marique, 16½x 13½ inches, ½-inch straight edge on three sides, \$24.30. A Cook's Wares.

8 Insulated aluminum cookie sheet, by CushionAire, 14x16 inches, \$17. A Cook's Wares, Sur la Table.

9 Nonstick Silverstone-coated half sheet pan, by Chicago Metallic, 13x18 inches, \$23. The Wooden Spoon catalog.

10 Nonstick cookie sheet, by Kaiser La Forme, 14x16 inches, \$19.80. A Cook's Wares, A Cook's Gallery Online.

and I develop all my recipes on them. They're durable and affordable." In fact, *Fine Cooking* test kitchen director Abby Dodge said that half sheet pans "give you the biggest bang for the buck." She said they're her favorite because they stay flat, you can freeze things on them, and you wind up using them for so many things. Kathleen Stewart, owner of The Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California, said she loves them because they conduct heat so well, "so evenly, but not too quickly—perfect for cookies."

The pros are quick to tell you that kitchen parchment goes hand in hand with a good baking sheet. Virtually everyone I talked to ended with, "And I

always use parchment." Abby Dodge feels so strongly about it that she urges the students in her cooking classes to buy the large boxes of parchment sold in restaurant-supply stores and split the cost with a friend. (Bridge Kitchenware in New York will split boxes of parchment for you). Flo Braker, author of *The Simple Art of Perfect Baking* and the charmingly opinionated owner of 60 baking sheets, drives home the need for parchment: "There's a reason all the professional bakers use it—you just get more even results." It prevents sticking, helps to protect

from burning, and is easy to move around.

And what about the new reusable silicone baking liners? Many bakers like them but don't find them necessary for home cooking. They're best for delicate baking like lady fingers or sugar work, said Nancy Silverton and Nick Malgieri, since the heavy liners can actually inhibit browning.

NONSTICK SURFACES OR HEAVY FRENCH STEEL MAY BE GOOD OPTIONS FOR YOU

Since the pros all use parchment, it's no surprise that they're not big fans of nonstick baking sheets. But some pragmatic bakers, like Flo Braker, admit that

they like nonstick surfaces for the same reason a lot of home cooks do: they're easy to clean. Maggie Glezer, author of the forthcoming *Artisan Breads*, also likes a particular nonstick pan that's made by Chicago Metallic and coated with Silverstone. It's the same dimensions and heft of the uncoated aluminum half sheet pan. "I use this pan all the time for roasting vegetables, not just for baking. The only problem with the nonstick surface is that if you put oil on it, the oil cooks into a sticky buildup."

Many cooks complain about the dark color of nonstick surfaces because it tends to overbrown things (dark surfaces retain radiant heat, rather than reflecting it). Carolyn Bridge, co-owner of Bridge Kitchenware, said, "The darker the color of the nonstick finish, the darker your cookies are going to get. But if you want nonstick, buy the lightest colored coating you can find, like Kaiser La Forme."

If a dark finish doesn't bother you, you may enjoy the high heat absorption of French steel. Many French-trained cooks rave about the heavy black steel baking sheets made by Matfer in France. These sheets are terrific heat conductors (Flo Braker lowers cooking temperatures by 25 degrees when using them), and they produce very crisp crusts, which makes them nice for pizza or anything to which you want to give a quick boost of heat. Marcy Goldman, a Canadian baker and author of the forthcoming *A Treasure of Jewish Holiday Baking*, confirmed that French black steel is really good for anything you want to keep crisp on the bottom (such as a juicy pie tending toward sogginess) but definitely not good for sugar cookies. Despite the weight of black steel, these pans still tend to twist in the oven at high temperatures.

Many of the bakers I talked to don't use French steel because, as Susan Purdy, author of *Have Your Cake & Eat It, Too*, said, "It darkens crusts too much." Nick Malgieri added, "It conducts too much heat for my liking, and it has a tendency to overbrown and overbake. It also rusts." Nevertheless, if you want to

buy a French steel sheet, Carolyn Bridge suggests that you keep it seasoned and always dry it well to prevent rusting.

For the best characteristics of both steel and aluminum, take a look at the new professional baking sheet from Williams-Sonoma. Chicago Metallic, working with the kitchenware company, has developed an aluminum-coated steel rolled-rim half sheet pan. With a steel interior, it's heavier than the aluminum half sheet, yet with its aluminum exterior, it won't rust or warp. Flo Braker told me, "This is the thing I really love now. It really bakes like a dream."

I was also curious to know what the pros think of air-insulated cookie sheets. Many restaurant bakers, like Stephen Durfee, pastry chef at The French Laundry in the Napa Valley, said, "If I want to insulate, which I often do with delicate cookies, I just nest one half sheet pan inside another, which creates a pocket of air." And while many chefs and cookbook authors don't like the air-insulated pans because they don't produce the degree of crispness they like, I did find some enthusiastic supporters. Abby Dodge said that she's "a really big fan of air-insulated pans. You get less burning and superior results. You just have to monitor doneness because times are often longer."

Before you buy new baking sheets, heed Flo Braker's advice and measure the size of your oven. You'll get the best results if your baking sheet has two inches of room on each side of it for air to circulate. A standard 30-inch oven has a 22-inch-wide rack, which leaves just enough room on either side of the 18-inch-wide half sheet pan. Also, if you're only going to use your baking sheets for cookies, you'll get superior air circulation with unrimmed cookie sheets. Look for heavy-duty nonwarping aluminum cookie sheets with one or two raised edges (see sidebar).

Finally, "Keep in mind that you'll want a few small baking sheets for storing things in the freezer," reminds Flo Braker. To that end, one of Stephen Durfee's favorite items is the quarter sheet pan that's the same heavy-duty rimmed aluminum as the half sheet, only half the size, which just happens to be one of my favorite pans as well. I use it often for toasting nuts or breadcrumbs, as a mold for a small batch of polenta, or for baking a small free-form crostata.

Susie Middleton is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Sources

Broadway Panhandler (New York)
212/966-3434
Bridge Kitchenware (New York)
800/274-3435
A Cook's Wares (Pennsylvania)
800/915-9788
King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue,
(Vermont) 800/827-6836
La Cuisine (Virginia)
800/521-1176
Sur La Table (Washington)
800/243-0852
Williams-Sonoma (California)
800/541-2233
The Wooden Spoon (Connecticut)
800/431-2207
A Cook's Gallery Online,
www.acooksgallery.com

LINERS FOR BAKING SHEETS

Kitchen parchment, rolls of 30 square feet (\$3.95) and 70 square feet (\$6.95), Sur La Table; 16x24-inch sheets (40, \$3; 80, \$5.50), Bridge Kitchenware; 100-count half sheet pan size sheets (12¼x16½-inch) multi-use silicon-coated parchment, (\$14.95), King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue; unbleached parchment, rolls of 71 square feet (\$5.95), Broadway Panhandler, kitchen stores.

Silicone nonstick liner

(Silpat), 11½x16¾ inches, \$18 to \$24, reusable up to 2,000 times, King Arthur, La Cuisine, Williams-Sonoma.



Make a Meltingly Tender Lamb Tagine

Every cuisine has its own classic stew. Italy has *cacciatore*, France has *ragoût*, India has curry, and Mexico has *mole*. Morocco, the country I'm from, has *tagine* (pronounced TAH-jin and sometimes spelled *tajine*). This wonderful stew, with its many variations, is named for the earthenware dish in which the stew is traditionally cooked. The exotic-looking and often beautiful pot is topped with a conical lid that traps steam during cooking. The resulting dish is a fragrant stew with a meltingly tender texture and wonderfully blended flavors.

But the real art of making one of these fragrant stews lies not with the pot—you can substitute a heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid—but with

This easy Moroccan stew is fragrant with saffron, cinnamon, and cilantro

BY KITTY MORSE

the slow cooking of ingredients in a sauce that's exquisitely seasoned.

Tagines vary from region to region and from kitchen to kitchen. In towns along Morocco's two thousand miles of coastline, fresh seafood, such as tuna, sardines, or mussels, form the basis of many *tagines*. Inland, you'll find *tagines* made with meat and chicken. Most of the time, the meat is used sparingly to intensify the flavor of the sauce rather than to act as the focus. Vegetables and fruits often make up the bulk of the dish.

Whatever their other ingredients, most *tagines* include generous amounts of parsley and cilantro, as well as paprika, powdered ginger (Moroccans don't use fresh ginger), golden turmeric, a bit of Spanish saffron, and a good amount of freshly ground black pepper.

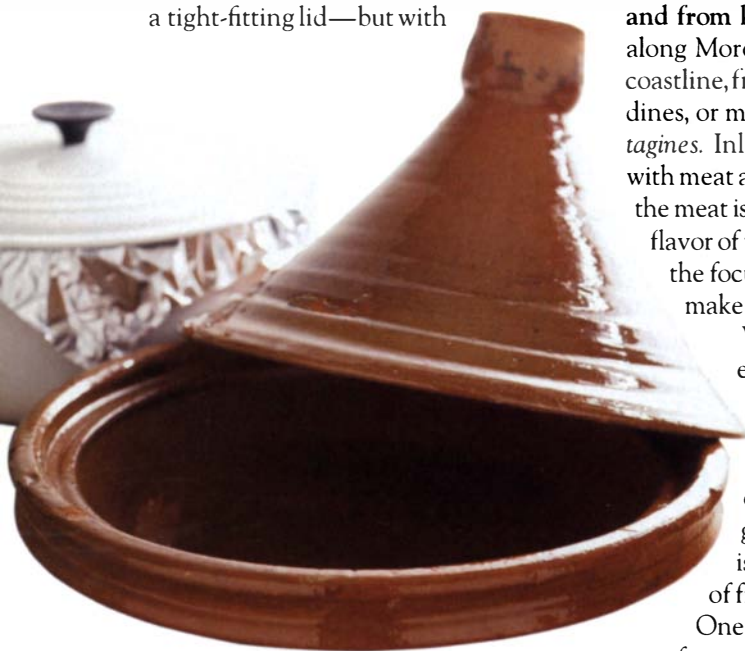
One of my favorite *tagines*, and the one featured here, combines the rich, sweet taste of prunes and honey with the full flavor of lamb and onions. Though this pairing may seem unusual, the blending of dried fruits and meat is a hall-

mark of Moroccan cuisine. The result is truly luscious; the prunes plump up with the juices from the meat and give the whole dish a silken texture.

MIMIC A TAGINE WITH A HEAVY POT AND ALUMINUM FOIL

At home, I have a collection of *tagines* from Morocco. Some are made from plain unfired clay while others have ornate glazes. I use them from time to time, mainly as serving dishes—they're quite dramatic when brought to the table—but more often I'll simply use a deep, heavy pot like my Dutch oven. Whatever pot you use, cover it with foil before putting on the lid to get a truly tight seal.

Brown the meat and add the bone to the pot for more flavor. I usually use half a leg of lamb when making this *tagine*, cutting the meat into chunks and adding the bone for extra flavor. Lamb



The stew's namesake pot. Traditional tagines have a conical lid that keeps steam—and flavor—inside. A heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid lined with foil will also do the trick.



The best Spanish saffron has more red threads than yellow. It may be expensive, but just a little adds a lot of flavor. Crumbling the saffron into the beef stock before it goes into the tagine helps disperse its flavor more evenly.



Prunes give the sauce a luscious sweetness that's a perfect complement to tender lamb. Almonds add a toasty flavor and some crunch. Some good bread or some couscous to mop up the delicious sauce is a must.

shanks also work well, and lamb shoulder and stew meat are even easier options. If you buy boneless lamb, ask your butcher for some lamb shank bones to add to the pot. Before adding any liquid ingredients, brown the meat on all sides in batches; an initial searing adds even more flavor.

Add the seasonings and liquids and then cover the pot. I gently crush the saffron threads and add them to the beef stock before pouring the stock into the pot. This step releases the saffron's flavor and disperses the spice evenly.

The wonderful thing about tagines is that, like most stews, they're easy to make. As the meat cooks, it creates its own wonderful sauce. My favorite moment when cooking a tagine is lifting the lid off the pot and watching my guests respond to the tantalizing fragrance that fills the room.

Lamb Tagine with Honey, Prunes, Onions & Toasted Almonds

I like to serve this tagine with couscous or chunks of warm, crusty bread. Serves six.

16 pearl onions
2 Tbs. olive oil
2 lb. lamb stew meat cut into 1-inch cubes,
or ½ leg of lamb cut into 1-inch cubes,
bone reserved
1 medium onion, finely diced
10 threads Spanish saffron
1½ cups homemade or low-salt canned
beef stock or water
⅓ cup honey
1 tsp. ground turmeric
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
⅛ tsp. ground mace
1 cup (about 24) pitted prunes
20 sprigs fresh cilantro, chopped
1 tsp. salt
1½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup whole almonds, toasted

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a small saucepan filled with boiling water, blanch the pearl onions for 1 min. Drain and let cool. Peel the onions and set aside.

In a medium Dutch oven or ovenproof heavy-based pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Brown the meat in batches on all sides. Transfer the meat to a

platter. Add the diced onion to the pot and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 min.

Meanwhile, grind the saffron in a mortar and pestle (or rub it between your fingers) and add it to the beef stock. Return the meat to the pot. Stir the saffron mixture into the pot with the lamb, along with any bones. Stir in the honey, turmeric, cinnamon, mace, and prunes. Add the cilantro. Cover the pot tightly with foil and then with a lid. Put the pot in the oven and bake until the lamb is tender, about 50 min. Add the pearl onions, cover, and cook for another 5 min.

Meanwhile, in a small nonstick frying pan, toast the almonds until golden. Set aside.

Remove the foil and lid. Carefully spoon off any grease. Add the salt and pepper. Return the pot, uncovered, to the oven, and let the sauce reduce slightly, about 5 min. Sprinkle the tagine with the toasted almonds. Serve on rimmed plates or in shallow bowls.

Kitty Morse, who was born in Casablanca, is the author of seven cookbooks, including The Vegetarian Table: North Africa (Chronicle, 1996) and the forthcoming A Biblical Feast (Ten Speed Press, 1998). ♦

Visit the

Take a trip through Vermont

Robert Howrigan, a seventh-generation sugarmaker uses the old technology of buckets, horses, and wood fires.



Real maple syrup is a genuine treat. Once you've tried it, no other syrup will do.



Well-trained horses know when to stop and go as the sap is collected bucket by bucket.

Wood fires power Howrigan's ancient evaporator. Boiling down sap is a little like making caramel—only a few moments stand between perfect syrup and a burnt mess.




Photo at right: Scott Phillips. All others: Susan Kahn.

Source of Maple Syrup

to discover what turns humble maple sap into tawny, luscious syrup

BY JAN NEWBERRY



I was a child of Mrs. Butterworth's, weaned on breakfasts of French toast floating in a sea of "pancake syrup." Then I moved from southern California (home of all things imitation) to New England, where I tasted pure maple syrup for the first time. Real maple syrup, I discovered, is full of subtleties. It's earthy, a little bit smoky, and tastes of caramel and fruit—nothing at all like the one-dimensional maple-flavored corn syrup that I used to drown my French toast in.

I've been fascinated with maple syrup ever since that first taste. It's not just the flavor that intrigues me; the alchemy that turns tree sap into syrup is a fascinating one and something that I'd always wanted to witness firsthand. So early last April I found myself ankle deep in mud on a tree-covered mountain in northern Vermont, where I had come in search of the source of real maple syrup.

A VISIT TO THE SUGARBUSH

The first stop on my maple pilgrimage was Dave Marvin's Butternut Mountain Farm in the town of Johnson. Marvin made his first batch of maple syrup when he was eleven years old and has been making it ever since. A former head of the Vermont Maple Industry Council, today he's one of the most respected sugarmakers in the state. And since that state is Vermont, you could say that Marvin is one of the most respected sugarmakers in the world. Sugarmakers are what the locals call the folks who make maple syrup. The groves of maple trees that cover the landscape are referred to as the sugarbush, and the process of making maple syrup is known as sugaring.

Vermont is serious about maple. The state makes over one-third of the nation's maple syrup, about 500,000 gallons annually. (The title for the world's largest maple syrup producer goes to Quebec.) Vermont has the most stringent grading standards of any state and a staff of full-time inspectors. Maple syrup from Vermont is denser than other maple syrups; it has less water and a more intense maple flavor.

SUGARMAKERS LIVE AT THE MERCY OF THE WEATHERMAN

The night before I left my home in New York for Vermont, a blizzard of wet snow knocked down the

power lines in my town, but the next morning the sun was shining bright, and I made the drive with only a light jacket. This dramatic swing between daytime and nighttime temperatures is ideal for sugaring. "It's the weather that determines when the syrup is made," Marvin explained to me.

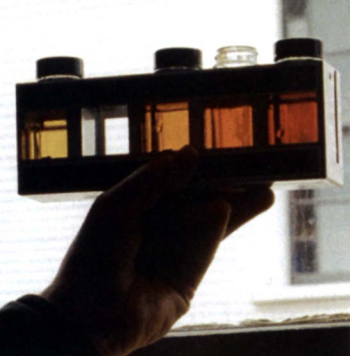
Sugaring begins when daytime temperatures rise above 40°F and nights still fall well below freezing. As the trees freeze, they fill with sap; when they thaw, the sap begins to flow. The season begins in late February or early March and typically runs in

Seeing the sugarmakers

To be sure to catch the sugarmakers in full swing, the best time to visit is during the second half of March and the first week or two of April. Don't forget to bring your mud boots!

The sugarmakers below offer tours, and we've listed a few other points of culinary interest. For more listings or information and to order maple products by mail, call the Vermont Department of Agriculture at 802/828-2416.





Sugarmakers use standard color samples to help determine the grade for their syrup.



Syrup changes character through the season. Colder weather makes a lighter, more delicate syrup. As the season warms, the syrup gets more robust.

VERMONT MAPLE SYRUP BY MAIL

Butternut Mountain
Farm, Johnson, VT;
800/828-2376

Couture's Maple
Shop, Brattleboro,
VT; 800/845-2733

Gillian Family Farm,
Cabot, VT;
802/849-6045

fits and starts for six weeks or more into the middle of April. Cold daytime temperatures can halt the flow and an early thaw can bring the season to an abrupt end.

CHANGING FROM SAP TO SYRUP

As we walked through his grove of maples, Marvin offered me a taste of the sap that collected in one of the buckets that hung from a tree. I don't know who first figured out that tree sap would taste good on top of pancakes, but whoever it was had an awfully good imagination. The thin, watery sap bears little resemblance to the sweet, dark syrup that comes in a bottle.

As Marvin told me, maple sap looks like water because that's mostly what it is; the sugar content averages just 2% to 3% of the raw sap. In order to become syrup, the sap must be reduced and the water must be cooked away. Forty gallons of sap are required to make just one gallon of syrup.

Sugaring is broken down into three steps—tapping, gathering, and boiling. Tapping means drilling a small hole in the tree and fitting it with a spout. The sap that runs from these holes is collected and rushed back to the sugarhouse (maple sap is highly perishable) and transferred to an evaporator where it's boiled down to syrup.

Anyone who's ever made caramel can relate to the sugarmaker's task. You stand around waiting and watching, and then, all of a sudden, it happens. The color starts to change and only a moment's inattention stands between golden, fine-flavored syrup and a blackened disaster.

SYRUP TECHNOLOGY OLD AND NEW

Syrup-making today is a wonderful combination of old-fashioned techniques and high technology. All over New England, families still hang tin buckets from stately backyard maples and boil down the sap on their kitchen stoves to make a few gallons of syrup.

Then there are men like Robert Howrigan, a seventh-generation sugarmaker who collects his sap in buckets, gathers it on horse-driven sleds, and transfers it to an ancient wood-fired evaporator via

a wooden trough carved by his grandfather in the late 1800s.

Howrigan's tin buckets and horses provide a stark contrast to the miles of plastic tubing that most commercial sugarmakers use today to collect the sap rather than incur the labor costs of collecting with buckets. Those tubes carry the sap to a reverse osmosis machine (a tool for larger-scale sugarmakers that separates the water from the sugar in the sap).

COLOR AND FLAVOR DETERMINE GRADE

As the sugaring season progresses, biochemical changes in the sap affect the color and flavor of the syrup. Early on, in the coldest part of the season, the syrup tends to be lighter and more delicate in flavor. As the weather gets warmer, the syrup gets darker and the maple flavor becomes more pronounced.

◆ **The lightest syrups are Grade A light amber—**called Fancy in Vermont. The most delicately flavored syrup, Fancy fetches the highest price and is a sugarmaker's source of pride.

◆ **Next comes Grade A medium amber and Grade A dark amber,** each a bit darker and stronger in flavor.

◆ **Then there's the dark, robust-flavored Grade B** that has the most assertive maple taste. While the flavor of Grade A syrups tends to get lost when combined with stronger tasting ingredients, Grade B is robust enough to hold its own and is the syrup recommended for cooking and baking.

At the end of the sugaring season, the syrup tends to get very dark and intensely flavored. This Grade C syrup is used commercially as a flavoring and is not generally sold to the public.

I like maple syrup best when combined with rich, mellow ingredients, such as milk, cream, and butter, that let the maple flavor take center stage, but it also pairs surprisingly well with ingredients that counter the syrup's sweetness. This is something sugarmakers know well and is why they often eat dill pickles with their syrup.

Jan Newberry is a cookbook editor and food writer, and a former managing editor of Fine Cooking. She lives in Oakland, California. ◆

Enjoy maple syrup in both sweet and savory dishes

Maple syrup's mellow sweetness can complement a lot more than just French toast and pancakes. But its distinct flavor can overwhelm, so use a light hand.

◆ Add a pour of maple to braised red cabbage, especially when it's flavored with a bit of smoky bacon and onion.

◆ Mix maple syrup, melted butter, and a bit of grated fresh ginger to brush onto winter squash during baking.

◆ Spike a pot of baked beans with a few tablespoons of maple syrup.

◆ Make a glaze of maple syrup, soy sauce, and a dash of hot sauce for basting roast chicken or Cornish hen.

◆ Substitute maple syrup for half of the sugar in a favorite bread pudding recipe.

◆ Toss chunks of apple with some maple syrup, a dash of cinnamon, and a sprinkle of lemon juice to use in an apple crisp or apple pie.

◆ Sweeten a cup of warm milk for a soothing, restorative bedtime drink.

Sushi

MASTER CLASS

No, you don't need raw fish to make this dish—try a California roll loaded with crabmeat or a spicy grilled tuna roll

BY PEGGI WHITING

When I started cooking Japanese food in the 1970s at a restaurant in Salt Lake City, Utah, I had no idea how popular sushi would become. Now, with sushi bars in every major town in the United States, it seems I'm not the only one who loves the delicate, fresh flavors and textures of this classic food. In 1987, I was lucky enough to train under a Registered Japanese National Treasure, master sushi chef Inou of Hama Sushi in Tokyo. I now run my own sushi restaurant, and my customers love the crisp, light flavors and pleasing textures of soft sushi rice cradling fresh vegetables or fish. While there's certainly no substitute for the variety and freshness you find at a good sushi bar, you can make delicious sushi at home with widely available ingredients just by mastering a few



Author Peggi Whiting at her sushi bar.

Wasabi

California Roll
filled with cooked
crab, cucumber,
and avocado

Seared tuna roll
filled with radish
sprouts and
grilled tuna

Pickled ginger



Ingredients

for authentic sushi: from left, nori (dried seaweed), bamboo rolling mat, pickled ginger, rice vinegar, soy sauce, sushi rice, and wasabi powder.

SOURCES FOR SUSHI-MAKING INGREDIENTS

Eden Foods Inc., 701 Tecumseh Road, Clinton, MI 49236; 800/248-0320. Call for product information (wasabi powder, nori, soy sauce, pickled ginger).

Gold Mine Natural Foods, 800/475-FOOD. Call for catalog or ask for the Sushi Lover's Kit and Lundberg Organic Sushi Rice.

The Oriental Pantry, 423 Great Rd., Acton, MA 01720; 800/828-0368. Call for catalog.

The Wooden Spoon, PO Box 931, Clinton, CT 06413; 800/431-2207. Call for catalog or ask for the Sushi Chef Sushi-Making Kit.

Rinse, cook, and season the rice



Measure the rice into a large saucepan and rinse it well until the water runs clear. Drain the rice and measure the correct amount of water into the pan. Let the rice soak for 20 minutes. Bring the water to a boil, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let the rice steam, covered, for 20 minutes more.



Moisten a shallow wooden bowl with a damp cloth and put the cooked rice in it. Mix the vinegar, sugar, and salt in a bowl, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Sprinkle the mixture over the rice and gently stir with a wooden spoon until the rice glistens. Spread the rice over the bottom of the bowl, cool for 20 minutes. Flip the rice over with the wooden spoon, and cool another 20 minutes.

Prepare the



Measure 3 tablespoons wasabi powder into a small bowl. Mix with cold water (about 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon) with two chopsticks or your fingers to make a paste. Be sure to wash your fingers, as wasabi is very hot.

easy techniques. And you don't even need to use raw fish.

One of the most popular forms of sushi happens to be the easiest to make at home. *Maki-sushi* (or nori rolls) are seasoned rice and fillings rolled in seaweed wrappers (or nori). Unlike *nigiri sushi* (slices of fish atop a small bed of molded seasoned rice), a nori roll can have a variety of fillings which may or may not include raw fish.

It's perfectly authentic to use smoked or cured fish, such as smoked eel, salmon, or trout, in sushi.

They're easy to find, and a sure thing for freshness. Cooked shellfish like crab and shrimp are also perfect for nori rolls. You can also sear or grill fish and slice it thinly.

Nori rolls are an excellent showcase for fresh vegetables. Choose your favorite combinations, but some of the ingredients that I like include cucumber slices, avocado slices, steamed asparagus spears, lettuce, sprouts, radishes, young seaweed, carrot sticks, and steamed squash. Eggs, scrambled or cooked in an omelet and thinly sliced, also make good fillings.

I'll show you two ways to make a nori roll — with the rice on the outside of the roll, or the rice on the inside and the nori on the outside. I've chosen to make a California Roll, filled with avocado, cucumber, and cooked crabmeat, as an example of an inside-out roll (where the rice is on the outside). The Seared Tuna Roll with Japanese radish sprouts and scallions has the nori on the outside of the roll. You can learn the techniques using these recipes, and then vary the fillings once you're comfortable making the rolls.

To make authentic sushi, you'll need a few key ingredients. The most important is Japanese-style sushi rice. Long-grain rice, minute rice, or other kinds of rice just won't mold like sushi rice. There are several good brands of sushi rice on the market, including Nishiki and New Rose brands, as well as Lundberg Farm's sushi rice.

You'll also need nori: very thin, usually brittle, rectangular sheets of dried seaweed that come in stacks of several sheets wrapped in cellophane. Look for brands that say "toasted." If you do buy nori that isn't toasted (it will seem limp), or if you live in a humid climate, toast the nori yourself by

fillings for the rolls



Cut slender wedges of avocado.

Try this trick: without peeling, trim the top and bottom of the avocado and cut it in segments lengthwise to the pit. Pull away the peel and then gently grasp a segment at a time and pull it off. Set the avocado aside as you prepare the cucumber and crabmeat; set them aside as well.

waving it over a medium-hot burner until crisp or by putting it directly on a rack in a 350°F oven for two minutes.

To your shopping list, add wasabi powder (ground from Japanese horseradish root—this becomes a very spicy condiment when reconstituted with water), unseasoned rice vinegar, a good-quality soy sauce like Kikkoman, a jar of pickled ginger, and a bamboo sushi-rolling mat. Check natural food stores, grocery stores, Asian markets, and mail-order sources (opposite).

Buy the best-quality fresh ingredients you can find for the fillings. For the California Roll, avoid canned crabmeat and check your local fish counter for cooked lump crabmeat or cooked crab legs or claws. If you can't find crab, use cooked shrimp. Buy top-quality tuna for the Seared Tuna Roll. If you can't find the spicy Japanese radish sprouts, you can substitute other sprouts or shredded Daikon radish.

Read through the photo captions carefully and you'll be ready to roll. The recipe

Coat the nori with rice to start the California roll



Stack the sheets of toasted nori and cut them in half, parallel to the lines on the seaweed (as if you were folding the longest side in half). Or crease them along the fold and then tear them apart.



Completely wrap the bamboo mat in plastic wrap (to keep the rice from sticking) and put the nori in place. Make sure the mat lies completely flat after wrapping. Lay a sheet of nori horizontally on the wrapped mat, aligned with the edge of the mat that's closest to you.



Moisten your hands with a little water to keep the rice from sticking. (Keep a bowl of water handy). Grab a large handful of rice and toss and squeeze it lightly to form a loose oval ball.



Starting in one of the upper corners of the nori, spread the ball of rice across the top of the nori to the other side. Using both hands, "pull" the rice down to cover the nori. Spread the rice until the sheet is covered in a layer about 1/4 inch thick. Sprinkle the rice with sesame seeds or flying fish roe and pat evenly.



Holding the top corners of the rice-covered nori, flip it over. The rice will now be face down on the mat. Keep the bottom edge of the nori even with the edge of the mat closest to you.

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making sushi on *Fine Cooking's* web site.
<http://www.taunton.com/fc/>

Add the fillings and use the mat to make a neat roll



Using your fingers, spread a pinch of wasabi across the middle of the nori. A little goes a long way, so spread lightly. You can always put more in your dipping sauce if you like more heat.



Lay equal amounts (about a small handful) of each ingredient down the middle of the nori. Start with a row of cucumber, overlap with the avocado slices, and then lay the crab on top.



With all eight fingers holding in the ingredients, lift the edge of the mat closest to you with your thumbs. Tucking the ingredients into the middle of the roll, bring the edge of the mat over the ingredients and straight down. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the nori exposed at the top edge.

A seared tuna roll has the nori on the outside

For the tuna roll, you can use the bamboo mat with or without the plastic wrap. Follow the steps for assembling the California roll, but when it's time to spread the rice, make the following adjustments so that the rice and fillings are on the inside of the nori: When spreading the rice over the nori, leave a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch band of nori uncovered at the end farthest from you. Don't flip the nori and rice over, but put the wasabi and tuna roll ingredients directly on the rice. Moisten the exposed strip of nori with water, and then roll and cut following the photos above.



For the Seared Tuna Roll, the rice and fillings get rolled inside the nori.

makes ten rolls, so have a few friends over and you can all learn to roll.

If you want, make the rice before everyone arrives. Once it cools slightly (about 40 minutes), you can keep it at the perfect lukewarm temperature by storing it in a cooler. When you start rolling, you'll find that your second sushi roll will look better than your first, and your third will look better than your second....

Master Recipe for California Rolls & Seared Tuna Rolls

Yields 5 California rolls (30 pieces) and 5 seared tuna rolls (30 pieces), with a little leftover rice.

FOR THE RICE:

4 cups raw Japanese sushi rice
4 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups water
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unseasoned rice vinegar
5 Tbs. sugar
1 tsp. salt

FOR THE CALIFORNIA ROLLS:

$\frac{1}{2}$ recipe cooked rice
3 sheets toasted nori (dried seaweed)
3 Tbs. wasabi powder (yields enough prepared wasabi for assembling and serving 5 rolls)
1 large, ripe avocado
1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into fine julienne
6 oz. cooked crabmeat or diced cooked shrimp, picked over for shells
Sesame seeds or flying fish roe for garnish (optional)



Press the roll together with your thumbs and middle fingers, while pressing down on the roll with your index fingers.



Lifting just the edge of the mat, pull it forward so that the nori roll rolls another quarter turn. The seam will now be on the bottom.



Press again with fingers and thumbs, molding the roll into a squared log.

Cut and serve the roll



Lift the mat away and transfer the roll to a cutting surface. Dip a sharp knife into a bowl of water and let a bead of water roll down the knife's blade. Cut the roll in half and then bring one half around and cut both into thirds. Stand the pieces up on a cut side.

FOR THE TUNA ROLLS:

*½ recipe cooked rice
3 sheets toasted nori (dried seaweed)
3 Tbs. wasabi powder (yields enough prepared wasabi for assembling and serving 5 rolls)
1 recipe Seared Tuna (below)
6 scallions (green tops only), thinly sliced
4-oz. package Japanese radish sprouts (Kaiware), or other sprouts, shredded Daikon radish, or julienned cucumber*

FOR THE SEARED TUNA:

*8 oz. fresh tuna fillet
¼ tsp. shichimi (Japanese 7-spice powder) or a pinch of cayenne
⅓ cup soy sauce*

FOR SERVING:

*10-oz. jar pickled ginger
Good-quality soy sauce for dipping
Prepared wasabi*

To make the sushi rice and assemble the rolls, follow the photos and captions starting on p. 64.

To make the seared tuna for the tuna rolls, season the tuna with the shichimi or cayenne and marinate it in the soy sauce for 5 min. Sear or grill the tuna in a medium-hot skillet spritzed with nonstick cooking spray for 1½ min. on each side. Cut into horizontal strips, against the grain.



Serve the sushi with pickled ginger, a small dish of soy sauce, and a little mound of wasabi. Since everyone likes varying degrees of heat, you can let each guest mix a little wasabi into a small dish of soy sauce. The pickled ginger is to be eaten as a palate cleanser between pieces of sushi.

Peggi Whiting and her husband, Clint, own Ichiban Sushi in Park City, Utah. They have three children, including baby Sean, who arrived only weeks after Peggi's photo shoot for Fine Cooking. ♦

Delicious Butterscotch Desserts

Caramel with a kick, butterscotch gives a rich, deep, buttery flavor to pudding, pears, ice cream, and tarts

BY MELISSA MURPHY



Everyone's happy when there's butterscotch around. Melissa Murphy uses dark brown sugar and a generous pinch of salt to give her sauce its compellingly delicious flavor.

As the little sister of two tormenting older brothers, I often took refuge in the kitchen with my mother, who loved to bake. She would always let me help, but the dessert I was most proud of was the one I could make all by myself: butterscotch pudding, right out of the box.

I now make pudding that's thickened with egg yolks and cream, not cornstarch and chemicals, and butterscotch is still one of my favorite flavors. As a pastry chef, I find myself returning to it again and again. I love to develop recipes that show off its buttery, toasty caramel flavor: luscious baked pears topped with a butterscotch sauce made right in the baking pan; toasted-nut tartlets bound by a thick butterscotch filling; rich homemade ice cream studded with pieces of butterscotch crunch; and a thick, deeply flavored butterscotch pudding that's simply irresistible.

BUTTER, BUT NO SCOTCH

Butterscotch, as its name implies, is made with butter, but there isn't necessarily any liquor in it, though I sometimes add a splash. The *scotch* part may have more to do with where butterscotch is said to have originated, in Scotland in the 1700s.

Butterscotch is caramel—and then some. Whereas caramel is made with white sugar, butterscotch uses brown sugar for a deeper flavor. It's also



enriched with butter or cream, and it gets a flavor boost from a generous dose of salt.

DELICIOUS DESSERTS FROM PANTRY STAPLES

Aside from its great flavor, I like the fact that butterscotch is simple and versatile, and it's made with ingredients that are almost always on hand.

Dark brown sugar offers the most flavor. Brown sugar is white sugar combined with molasses. The darker the brown sugar, the more molasses it contains, and the stronger the flavor. With few excep-

tions, I like to make my butterscotch desserts using dark brown sugar. Not only does it give the butterscotch a deeper flavor, but it also contributes to the dark golden color we have come to know as butterscotch. When making the crunch for the Butterscotch Crunch Ice Cream, however, I opt for light brown sugar. It has less moisture, and so it makes a candy that will harden when cooled.

In my butterscotch sauce, I use some corn syrup because it inhibits crystallization during the cooking process, keeping the sauce smooth. Corn syrup is

Warm butterscotch sauce is wonderful on grilled fruit, like this pineapple; it's also a perfect partner for ice cream. The sauce will keep in the refrigerator for about two weeks.

Simple pantry staples produce a rich butterscotch sauce



Dark brown sugar gives butterscotch a deep flavor. Add it along with white sugar to melted butter.



A pot of butterscotch will bubble and sputter. Keep cooking it at a full boil to keep the ingredients from separating, but use a long spoon to stir it.

also quite hygroscopic, meaning it prevents moisture loss, so it gives the sauce a longer shelf life.

Salt and vanilla spark the flavor of butterscotch. Though salt may seem strange in this sweet concoction, it actually helps intensify the flavor of the butterscotch without making its own flavor evident. Like salt, vanilla has the ability to discreetly bring out the flavors of other ingredients. If you leave out the salt or vanilla, your butterscotch will seem bland and one-dimensional.

COOK BUTTERSCOTCH TO THE COLOR OF AN OLD PENNY

The trick to making butterscotch is to be bold about cooking it. In my pudding recipe, I start by cooking sugar and water until it's good and dark, a deep golden brown like a Sugar Daddy or an old penny. You don't want to burn it, but if you tread too lightly, you won't create that wonderful caramelized flavor

and the pudding will taste too sweet. In the other recipes, where most of the ingredients are cooked together, it's hard to see a color change because of the brown sugar, so let the mixture boil away for about five minutes, allowing it to bubble and sputter. If you don't, the butterscotch will separate.

Finally, when working with butterscotch, be extra vigilant: because it cooks at such a high temperature, it can easily burn you.

Many flavors warm up to butterscotch. I'm a sucker for butterscotch candy (pun intended), but I love to pair butterscotch with other flavors. I absolutely adore it with fruits. Simple ways to enjoy butterscotch and fruit include drizzling butterscotch sauce over grilled pineapples or sautéed bananas. Dark chocolate and coffee flavors enhance the toasty taste of butterscotch, while white chocolate, coconut, and all kinds of toasted nuts taste great with butterscotch in cookies, brownies, and tarts.



Turn off the heat before adding the cream. Don't be tempted to taste the sauce until it cools to warm or you'll risk a burn.

Butterscotch Sauce

This sauce, which is featured in the Nuts About Butterscotch Tartlets (below), is also great warm drizzled over grilled pineapple, ice cream, or even apple pie. Refrigerated, it will keep for about two weeks. Reheat it gently, adding a little cream if it's too thick. *Yields 2½ cups.*

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter
⅔ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
⅔ cup sugar
1½ tsp. salt
2 Tbs. water
¾ cup light corn syrup
¾ cup heavy cream
2 tsp. vanilla extract

In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, melt the butter. Stir in the two sugars, the salt, water, and corn syrup. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring to dissolve the sugars. Let the mixture boil for 5 min., stirring often. You'll see big, slow bubbles as it boils. Remove the sauce from the heat. Carefully whisk in the cream and vanilla (the sauce may sputter). Allow the sauce to cool to warm before serving.

Nuts About Butterscotch Tartlets

You'll need six 4-inch tartlet pans to make these small tarts. If you don't have all the nuts on hand, just use 1½ cups total of what you do have; I've made this recipe with just cashews—it's delicious. *Serves six.*

FOR THE TARTLET CRUST:

6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
2 Tbs. sugar
½ tsp. baking powder
Pinch salt
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted cold butter, cut into small pieces
1 large egg, beaten slightly
1 Tbs. cold water; 1½ tsp. more if needed

FOR THE FILLING:

½ cup cashews, well toasted
½ cup sliced almonds, well toasted
½ cup walnut pieces, well toasted
⅓ cup shredded coconut, well toasted
½ cup golden raisins
1¼ cups warm Butterscotch Sauce (see recipe at left)

To make the crust—In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the butter and cut it into the dough using two knives, a pastry blender, or your fingertips until the dough looks crumbly. Add the egg and 1 Tbs. water; mix with a fork until the dough just holds together. (If the dough won't come together, add up to another 1½ tsp. water, a tiny bit at a time.) Don't overmix; the dough should feel slightly sticky. Shape the dough into a 6-inch log. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut the chilled dough into six equal pieces. Roll each piece into a round about ⅛ inch thick. Prick the rounds all over with a fork and gently fit them into 4-inch tartlet pans, trimming any excess dough.

Line each tartlet with foil and fill with dried beans or pie weights. Bake the tartlet shells for about 15 min. Remove the pie weights and the foil and bake an additional 5 min. until golden. Cool on a rack.

To fill and bake the tartlets: Heat the oven to 350°F. Combine the toasted nuts, coconut, and raisins with the warm butterscotch sauce. Divide the filling among the six tartlet shells. Bake until the filling just starts to bubble, 7 to 9 min. Using a wide spatula, carefully transfer the tartlets to a rack. Allow the tartlets to cool for 5 min. Carefully remove the tartlets from their pans and serve warm with a dollop of unsweetened whipped cream or *crème fraîche*, if you like. *(More recipes follow.)*

Toasted nuts and toasty butterscotch make a perfect match.

This tartlet is quite sweet, but you'll find yourself taking bite after bite until—alas—it's gone.



Butterscotch Crunch Ice Cream

If you like your ice cream not so sweet, use only two-thirds of the candy; the rest will keep in an airtight container at room temperature for two weeks. *Yields 1 quart.*

FOR THE BUTTERSCOTCH CRUNCH:

¼ cup heavy cream
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter
1¼ cups firmly packed light brown sugar
½ tsp. salt
1 Tbs. Scotch whisky
1 tsp. vanilla extract

FOR THE ICE-CREAM BASE:

3 cups milk
1 vanilla bean, split
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
9 large egg yolks
1 tsp. vanilla extract

To make the butterscotch crunch—Spray a 13x9-inch baking pan or Pyrex dish with nonstick spray or grease it very lightly. In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, combine the cream, butter, brown sugar, and salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring often. When big bubbles start to form, check the mixture with a candy thermometer. As soon as it reaches 285°F, remove it from the heat and carefully stir in the whisky and vanilla. Carefully pour the mixture into the prepared pan, spreading it with an oiled spatula. Let cool. Break the cooled candy into chunks and pulse the chunks in a food processor (in batches if necessary) until the pieces are the size of corn kernels. If you create a lot of powder, you might want to sift the crunch before adding it to the ice cream.

To make the ice cream—In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, combine the milk and vanilla bean and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Fill a large bowl with ice.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk the brown sugar, egg yolks, and vanilla extract until combined. Slowly pour some of the hot cream mixture into the yolk mixture, stirring to temper it. Return this mixture to

the pan and cook over medium heat, stirring until it's slightly thickened and coats the back of a wooden spoon.

Pour the mixture into a clean medium bowl and nestle it into the bowl of ice; stir the mixture to cool it and then refrigerate until very cold. Strain the mixture and freeze it in an ice-cream maker following the manufacturer's directions. When almost completely frozen, swirl in the butterscotch crunch: put half of the ice cream in a chilled stainless-steel bowl, sprinkle half of the crunch on top, and swirl with a butter knife. Top with the remaining ice cream and crunch and swirl again. Cover the ice cream tightly with plastic wrap and freeze.

Butterscotch Pudding

Transform ordinary ingredients into an irresistible dessert with this luscious pudding. *Serves six.*

6 large egg yolks
¼ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
1 cup milk
2 cups heavy cream
½ cup sugar
¼ cup water
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla extract

Heat the oven to 300°F. In a large mixing bowl, lightly whisk the egg yolks until smooth. Set aside.

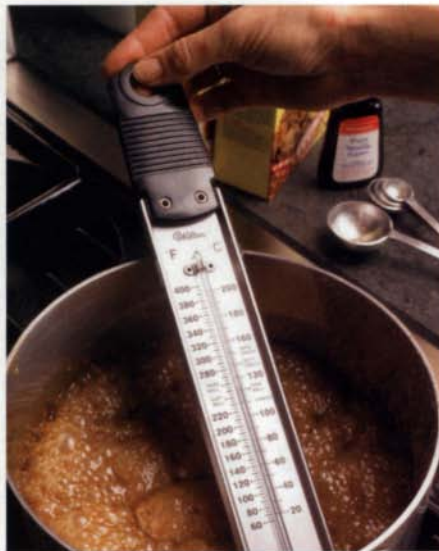
In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, heat the brown sugar, milk, and cream over medium-high heat, stirring to dissolve the brown sugar. Scald the mixture (don't boil it) and remove it from the heat.

While the cream mixture is heating, dissolve the sugar and water over low heat in a large, heavy-based saucepan. Increase the heat to high and boil the sugar. If the sugar starts to sputter, use a pastry brush dipped in

Making the crunch for the ice cream



Heat the cream, butter, and brown sugar. Stir often to dissolve the sugar.



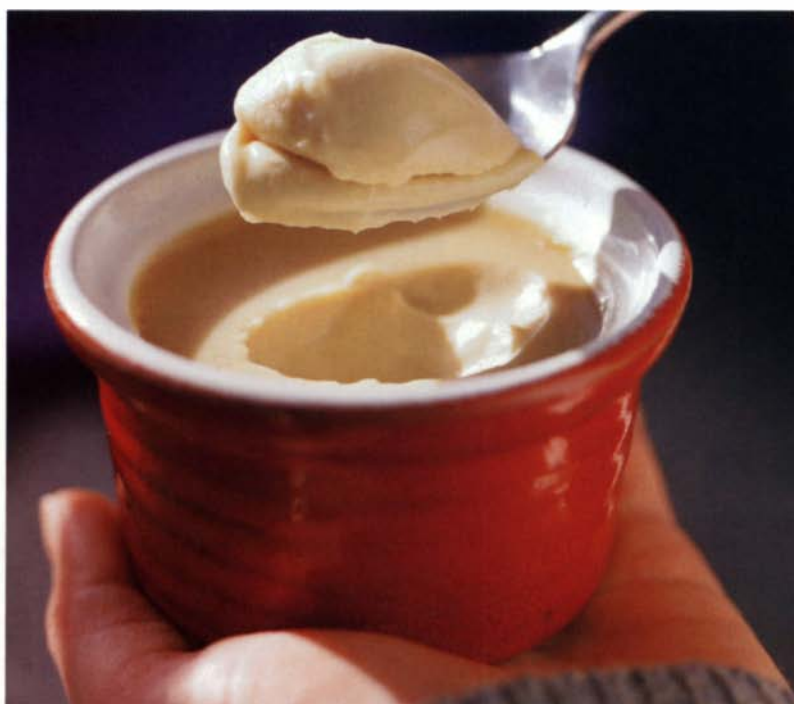
Let the mixture boil until it reaches 285°F. Add the vanilla and Scotch off the heat.



Use an oiled spatula to spread the butterscotch. Once cooled, break the candy into pieces in a food processor.



Bits of butterscotch candy add crunch to homemade ice cream.



Rich, creamy butterscotch pudding melts in your mouth. For the best texture, cook it until the custard is just set.

water to wash down the sides of the pan. As soon as the sugar turns dark amber (like an old penny), carefully and slowly pour the hot cream into it, stirring the mixture. (The caramel will bubble as you add the cream, so use a long wooden spoon or a whisk to combine them.)

Gently and slowly whisk this mixture into the egg yolks. Stir in the salt and vanilla. Strain and cool in an ice bath or refrigerate until cool.

Skim off any air bubbles from the pudding mixture and divide the cool mixture among six 6-oz. ramekins. Set the ramekins in a shallow roasting pan and fill the pan with hot water until it reaches halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the pan with foil.

Bake the puddings until just set. Begin checking after 1 hour. When gently shaken, they should no longer look liquid; instead, the custard will move as one mass. Allow the puddings to cool to room temperature in the water. Refrigerate until cool, cover, and then chill for several hours or overnight before serving.

Butterscotch Baked Pears

I wouldn't say no to a scoop of vanilla ice cream with this dessert. *Serves four.*

4 ripe but firm pears

½ lemon

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) butter, cut into pieces

¼ cup sugar

¼ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar

⅔ cup heavy cream

1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. salt

1 Tbs. Scotch whisky (optional)

Heat the oven to 375°F. Peel the pears, cut them in half lengthwise and, using a melon baller, scoop out the cores. Rub them all over with the lemon half to prevent browning.



Bake pears in butterscotch for a delicious one-pan dessert.

Baking time will vary depending on the ripeness of the fruit.

In a large (10-inch), heavy-based, ovenproof skillet, melt the butter. Add the sugar and brown sugar and stir to dissolve. Arrange the pears in the pan, cut side down, in a single layer. Bake the pears uncovered, basting occasionally with the liquid in the pan, until they begin to soften and color slightly. Depending on the pears' ripeness, baking time can range from 20 min. to 1 hour. Remove the pears with a slotted spoon and set aside.

Transfer the pan to a burner and boil the mixture left behind over medium-high heat until it reaches a rich, golden-brown color and smells like caramel, 2 to 5 min. Slowly whisk the cream into the caramel until smooth. Add the vanilla, salt, and Scotch, if using. Serve the sauce over the warm pears.

Melissa Murphy just opened Sweet Melissa, a pastry shop/café, in Brooklyn, New York, where she also lives. Specialty cakes, French pastries, American classics—and butterscotch, of course—are all on the menu. ♦

Sorting out white sugar, from fine powders to coarse crystals

White sugar is perhaps the most modest member of the pantry, so unobtrusive that we tend to take it for granted. Certainly it's true that white sugar lasts forever, unless it gets wet. And regardless of its source (sugar cane or sugar beets), all granulated white sugar tastes the same. It's 99.9% pure sucrose, refined and processed into small crystals.

The size of the crystals determines the sugar's use in the kitchen. The most common white sugar—what most of us spoon into coffee and use for baking—is simply called standard granulated sugar (though it's sometimes labeled “fine granulation”). An all-purpose sugar, it dissolves readily in warm and hot liquids and works in most types of cooking.

Confectioners' sugar (a.k.a. icing or powdered sugar) is pulverized granulated sugar that's been milled with a bit of cornstarch (about 3% to 4%). Since confectioners' sugar is so fine, it dissolves readily in any liquid or fat, hot or cold, so it's



Standard granulated sugar is an all-purpose sweetener that can be used for most types of cooking.

often used to sweeten uncooked foods without making them grainy. Its powdered texture also works beautifully to dust on desserts. The cornstarch, which absorbs moisture from the air and helps prevent clumping, sets this sugar apart from the other white sugars in several ways. Some people notice the raw taste of the starch in uncooked foods. The cornstarch can be a plus, however, helping to stiffen meringues, harden decorative royal icings, and thicken uncooked candies.

Superfine sugar also dissolves well in cold and room-temperature liquids, making it



Confectioners' sugar dissolves rapidly in liquids and fats at any temperature, making it ideal for sweetening uncooked foods.



Superfine sugar improves the texture of cakes by aerating the batter with its many tiny crystals and sharp edges.

useful for meringues (which weep if there's any undissolved sugar). But unlike confectioners' sugar, superfine sugar is granulated. It's also called ultrafine, instant dissolving, bar, or castor sugar, its British name.

Of all the granulated sugars, superfine has the tiniest and most uniform crystals. The tiny granulation improves the texture of cakes and other butter-and-sugar batters be-

cause the crystals' many sharp edges cut into the butter during creaming, forming many air pockets (see Basics, *Fine Cooking* #20). If you can't find superfine sugar, you can make your own by grinding granulated sugar in a food processor for 30 to 40 seconds.

While shopping for sugar, keep in mind that the sugar industry has not standardized its labels, so stay alert to inconsistencies between brands.

Glass vs. metal baking pans

Your choice affects cooking times and crustiness

Size isn't the only thing that counts when choosing a pan from the many in your cupboard. The material it's made of will affect both the baking time and the color of your breads, pies, cakes, and brownies.

Glass pans give food a darker, browner crust, so they're generally best for breads and pies, which benefit from a deeply baked exterior. Because of the way glass transfers heat in the oven, it will bake both faster and darker than most metal pans (the

exceptions are very dark, heavy-gauge metal pans, like the black steel pans used in professional kitchens. These intense heat conductors cook quickly and will also turn out appealing, dark crusts.)

Lighter-colored pans give you a paler crust, which is what you want with delicate cakes and brownies. Light-colored aluminum and shiny stainless-steel pans reflect more heat than glass and dark metal



pans. This may mean your baked goods will need a bit more time to finish cooking, but it also means the sugar and chocolate in these pastries won't be as likely to burn.

Avoid flimsy metal pans, which often bake unevenly and tend to warp at high temperatures. If you don't have a high-quality pan, it's worth investing in one (see “Pros Pick the Best Baking Sheets,” p. 55).

Skimming fat off your stew or pan drippings for better flavor

Before making a gravy from pan drippings or serving a beef stew, it's best to skim off the fat that has accumulated—a process known as degreasing. Degreasing is simple to do and ensures that you get the full flavor from the sauce or stew.

Thankfully, fat naturally separates and floats to the surface, making it easy to remove. Three effective degreasing methods are shown here.

To degrease pan drippings from a roast, first remove the meat from the pan. The clear fat will rise to the top while the darker flavorful juices that you want to keep will settle to the bottom. Tilt the pan gently so that the pan juices and fat puddle in a corner. Don't stir or slosh the liquid or you'll have to wait for the fat to float to the surface again.



Dip a spoon into the liquid just enough to allow the fat, but not the juices, to spill into the spoon.

Spoon off the fat following the illustration above. Keep tilting the pan so the fat layer stays deep and you can spoon it off.

Degreasing stews or soups that have been cooked with lots of vegetables or sprigs of herbs can be



For a pristine consommé or jus, drag strips of paper towel across the surface after skimming. The paper absorbs the last drops of fat.

more troublesome. I often strain the liquid, set the solids aside, and then degrease the liquid using one of the methods above.

Remember that you don't have to skim too meticulously if you plan



If time permits, refrigerate the liquid overnight. The fat will congeal on the surface so you can spoon it off.

to use the drippings for a flour-based gravy. A few teaspoons of fat will actually enrich the sauce.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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Aromatic Cilantro Adds a Cooling, Fresh Flavor

The sense of smell plays a powerful role in memories, so it's no wonder that when I chop cilantro, its fragrance transports me back to my mother's kitchen in Malaysia. There I'd often find my mom surrounded by red chiles, brown spices, and bright green bunches of cilantro.

Memories of cilantro are probably similar for people from Mexico, Morocco, India, Thailand, China, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. In fact, cilantro is perhaps the world's most popular herb. And as these cuisines become more familiar here, the evocative flavor of cilantro—it's what makes salsa sing—is fast becoming familiar, but no less alluring.

YOU SAY CORIANDER, I SAY CILANTRO

Some confusion exists about what to call cilantro. Some people call the green herb, which looks like flat-leaf parsley, fresh or green coriander, or even just coriander. But "coriander" refers to the entire plant—seeds, leaves, flowers, stems, and roots—all of which are edible. Nowadays, the leaves and stems are usually called cilantro, while the seeds, sold whole and powdered, are called coriander. (The two are not interchangeable, so be sure you know what your recipe is calling for.)

Most cuisines use the fresh leaves, whose flavor I'd describe as a lively mingling of pine, lemon, ginger, and pep-

per. In India, the seeds, with a more citrusy flavor, are used as often as the leaves. The roots, which are more pungent than the leaves, flavor soup stocks and curry pastes in Thailand.

CILANTRO ROUNDS OUT SPICY DISHES

Some people taste cilantro as soapy, though scientists don't know if this is due to genetics or to a lack of familiarity. If you don't like it on your first taste, keep trying it; some people develop a liking for it over time. I also suggest that its strong flavor be evaluated the way it is typically eaten—with other ingredients. Cilantro's bright green flavor adds a cooling element to spicy dishes, which is why you often find it paired with chiles. It also seems to cut the heavy feeling in some rich dishes, like meat stews or those featuring coconut milk. Cilantro also has a great affinity to other herbs such as mint, parsley, basil, and lemongrass.

LOOK FOR BRIGHT GREEN, AROMATIC BUNCHES

Good cilantro should give off an unmistakable fragrance. Slightly bruise one of the leaves and breathe in. If you don't smell its fragrance immediately, it will likely lack flavor.

Cilantro keeps best with its root ends in water. If the bunch comes with its roots attached, don't remove the roots until you're ready to use the leaves. Pop the bunch in a jar of cold water, cover the leaves with a plastic bag, and change the water every few days. You can also wrap the leaves in a slightly damp paper towel and store them in a plastic bag.

Wash sandy cilantro before using. Slice off the roots, swish the stems and leaves in a bowl of water, and dry them. But don't wash cilantro until you're ready to use it; the excess moisture can hasten its deterioration.

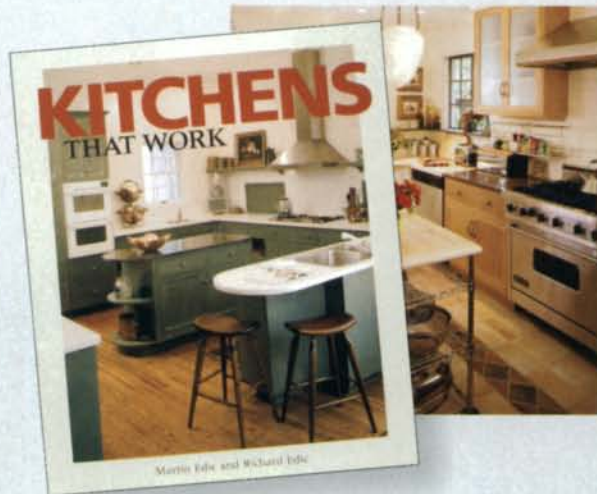
Chop the leaves with a sharp knife for the least damage. A sharp knife prevents bruising and helps keep the plant's color bright. Don't chop the leaves until you're ready to use them or they'll lose their flavor and darken.

The flavorful stems are great for stocks. Chop the stems' tender upper ends with the leaves, but save the tough bottoms to flavor stocks or dishes that will be strained.

Susheela Uhl is the founder of Horizons, a food and seasoning consulting firm in Mamaroneck, New York. ♦

Experiment with cilantro

- ♦ Garnish tomato-, carrot-, or coconut-milk-based soups with chopped fresh cilantro.
- ♦ Serve iced tea or freshly squeezed juice with a splash of lime juice and sprigs of cilantro.
- ♦ Make a flavorful dip from chopped tomato, cilantro, cucumber, green chiles, and plain yogurt.
- ♦ Try making pesto using cilantro in place of basil.
- ♦ Rub chicken or fish with chopped cilantro, ginger, and black pepper before grilling.
- ♦ Sprinkle chopped cilantro and chopped cashews or slivered almonds over cooked rice or couscous.
- ♦ Add cilantro to your favorite gazpacho or salsa recipe.



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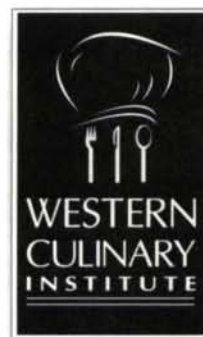
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This gumbo gets its gusto from “layers” of flavor, created by adding the same types of vegetables at different times during cooking.

have converted to water-soluble pectins, so the cells fall apart easily and they readily contribute flavor to the liquid.

LAYER INGREDIENTS TO BUILD COMPLEXITY

Soup makers frequently add different ingredients at different times, depending on how long they want each to cook. But adding the *same* ingredient at different times can give a soup a delicious complexity. Louisiana chef Paul Prudhomme uses this technique, called layering, in his gumbo. He starts by adding onions, okra, bell peppers, and celery to a dark roux (fat and flour cooked until deep brown and very hot). These vegetables will be literally cooked to pieces when the gumbo is done, but they contribute deep flavor from their long cooking which started with intense heat. Midway through cooking time, he adds some of the same vegetables. These will cook until very soft. Near the end of the cooking time, he’ll again add more of the same vegetables (and perhaps a few others), which stay crisp and bright in the finished gumbo.

Layering doesn’t work with vegetables that develop unpleasant flavors and odors when cooked for long periods. Cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, turnips, collard and mustard greens, kale, kohlrabi, and rutabaga produce double the amount of smelly

Make Grease-Free Soups Full of Satisfying Flavors

I know it’s supposed to be spring, but March winds are chilly and April showers are damp, and so a steaming bowl of soup is just what I want right about now. Soups run from clear broths to thick, hearty gumbos, but knowing a few important principles—like simmering instead of boiling and adding ingredients at the right time—can help you make any soup taste its best.

FOR A GOOD SOUP, GET A HEAVY POT

When I cooked in pots that had a stainless exterior with a layer of copper across the bottom and partially up the side, my food would always scorch right above the copper layer. This really impressed me with how important a good heat-spreading metal is. I like using a heavy-gauge pot with an enamel or stainless surface and a conductive core of aluminum, copper, or cast iron.

WATCH THE POT SO IT DOESN’T BOIL

Boiling, especially vigorously, will cause the fat in the ingredients to emulsify with the liquid—just like shaking oil and vinegar in a vinaigrette—and will leave you with a cloudy, greasy stock or soup.

ing, the starches in the vegetables swell more slowly and allow cells in the interior to break down and exude flavors more easily. (If you’ve ever tasted the celery or onions strained from a good stock, you found that they had practically no flavor: it all went

Simmer the soup—
don’t boil it—to prevent it
from becoming greasy.

Keeping the soup just below a simmer will prevent this emulsion, and most of the fat will then float to the top, where it’s easy to skim off.

START WITH COLD WATER FOR MORE FLAVOR

Starting ingredients in a cold liquid more fully extracts their flavors. With slow heat-

into the stock.) This is especially important when you use just water or a canned stock as your soup base.

Another way to enhance the soup’s flavor base is to use old, soft vegetables—not rotten, mind you, just very “mature” ones. The insoluble pectic substances (the “glue” that holds the cells together)

hydrogen sulfide (rotten-egg smell) when cooking time is increased from 5 to 7 minutes. To keep members of this family mild and pleasant tasting, slice them thin or chop them for quick cooking and add them to the soup only 4 or 5 minutes before serving.

BROWN AHEAD FOR A RICHER TASTE

Foods cooked in water will never get hotter than 212°F, so you can't get the wonderful sweet compounds that form at higher temperatures (some of the compounds formed in long-cooked onions are even sweeter than sugar) or that form with browning. Browning meats or vegetables in a little fat in a hot skillet before



Simmering keeps stock clear; boiling makes it cloudy. The fat can be easily skimmed off the simmered stock (left), while it has been emulsified into a murky, greasy brew in the boiled stock (right).

adding them to the soup adds tremendous flavor.

UNLOCK FLAVORS WITH FAT AND ALCOHOL

For a soup to be truly full-flavored and rich, you need to get all the flavors from

every ingredient. Many flavor compounds dissolve in water, which is the base of most soups anyway. But other flavor compounds dissolve in fat, so a little fat (either added to the soup or from meat that's in the soup) will

unlock and carry flavors.

Alcohol is the “mystery ingredient” that can add the final flavor dimension to a soup. Whether in wine or spirits, alcohol dissolves both water and fat and also some compounds that aren't dissolved by either water or fat. So a touch of sherry, Madeira, red, or white wine can add not only its own pleasing flavor to a soup, but it can also help unlock the flavor depths of the other ingredients.

Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of CookWise (William Morrow, 1997). She teaches cooking classes and food science across the country. ♦



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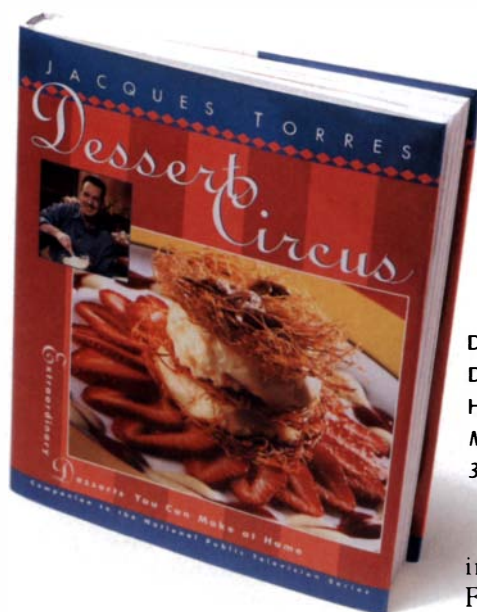


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A French Pastry Chef Brings Fancy Desserts Home

Dessert Circus: Extraordinary Desserts You Can Make at Home, by Jacques Torres. William Morrow, 1998. \$27.50, hardcover; 336 pp. ISBN 0-688-15654-1.

Bookshelves don't really groan, but one look at mine and you can see why the phrase was coined. I began collecting pastry cookbooks in college, reading them cover to cover as if they were the latest bestsellers. Rose Levy Beranbaum, Alice Medrich, Flo Braker (to name just a few) taught me how to make tender cakes and silky buttercreams; with their sound lessons, I launched my career as a baker and pastry chef in Boston.

Now I find myself in New York City, working at the epitome of French pastry shops, Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro, and I've quickly discovered the gaps in my work-

ing knowledge of classic French pastry. If I had only had Jacques Torres's *Dessert Circus* in my collection when I was starting out. Pastry chef of the legendary Le Cirque restaurant since 1989 (now Le Cirque 2000), Torres offers

You feel like Torres is right beside you when he anticipates your concerns.

an entertaining and accessible glimpse into his world of French pâtisserie. Torres, who is also the dean of culinary arts at the French Culinary Institute in New York, does an admirable job in making the intimidating art of French pastry enjoyable and inviting

to cooks of a wide range of experience.

After a lively and personal introduction on how to get started with the right equipment and ingredients, Torres dives in with a chapter devoted to pastry basics like *crème anglaise* and classic *génoise*—a solid primer for new cooks and a good refresher for those more experienced. From there, *Dessert Circus* (the companion to Torres's 26-part PBS television series airing this

recipe for *crème brûlée*, a fabulous *tarte Tatin*, an innovative chocolate soup with caramelized bananas and meringue, and a refreshing grape terrine made with Sauternes—all recipes that are super-appealing but accessible to home cooks.

For more ambitious cooks, Torres devotes an entire chapter to more challenging recipes that have become signature Le Cirque desserts: the Fontaine, a tempting combination of warm chocolate and raspberries with crispy phyllo triangles; Capelines, a layered cake made with passionfruit *crème brûlée* and apricot mousse; and the Cauldron, a bittersweet chocolate dome with piña colada Bavarian.

Torres is clearly passionate about his art, and his enthusiasm is infectious. You'll immediately want to run to the store to buy ingredients for the Pithiviers after he tells you that this is his favorite dessert to bring to dinner parties. Friends are incredulous of the

"Well, I love Rose Levy Beranbaum's *Cake Bible*, but the cookbook I use the most for inspiration is my 1975 copy of *The Joy of Cooking*. Whether it's Black Bottom Pie or sugar cookies, there's a recipe for everything in there."

—Stephen Durfee, pastry chef,
The French Laundry,
Yountville, California

"I'd probably have to say Flo Braker's *Simple Art of Perfect Baking* because the instructions are so clear, but also Lindsey Shere's *Chez Panisse Desserts*—it's terrific for all kinds of desserts."

—Kathleen Stewart, owner,
The Downtown Bakery
& Creamery,
Healdsburg, California

What's
your
all-time
favorite
dessert
cookbook?

"As an educator, I'm always looking for books that really explain and show technique, like Madeleine Kamman's *New Making of a Cook*, Shirley Corriher's *CookWise*, and Christian Teubner's *Chocolate Bible*.

—Mary Cech, instructor,
Culinary Institute of
America at Greystone

"I really like Nancy Silverton's *Desserts*. The recipes are fairly simple, but her flavors are complex, and there's a good deal of technique too. I also love *The Roux Brothers on Pâtisserie*. It's a classic."

—Debra Ponzek,
chef-owner, Aux Delices,
Greenwich, Connecticut

Jacques Torres's Chocolate Sauce

(Adapted from *Dessert Circus*, by Jacques Torres; for space, we've eliminated the metric measurements that appear in the book.) Taste is the most important aspect of this sauce, so it is imperative to use the best-quality bittersweet chocolate. I usually use European bittersweet chocolate like Callebaut from Belgium. This sauce is great to make in batches to give as gifts, and it makes a wonderful hot fudge sauce for ice cream. *Yields 2½ cups.*

8.8 oz. (generous 1 cup) whole milk
10.5 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped
4.4 oz. (generous ½ cup) heavy cream
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter
2.5 oz. (¼ cup + 2 Tbs.) granulated sugar

Pour the milk into a 2-quart heavy-bottomed saucepan, place over medium-high heat, and bring to a boil. When the milk boils, remove it from the heat and make a ganache by adding the chopped chocolate. Whisk well, stirring into

the edge of the saucepan to combine. The ganache should be homogeneous and smooth. Set the ganache aside.

In a 1-quart heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the heavy cream, butter, and sugar. Set the saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil, stirring constantly with a whisk. As the sauce cooks, it will begin to thicken slightly. When it reaches a boil, remove it from the heat and pour

it into a clean, dry bowl. Place plastic wrap directly on top of the sauce to keep a skin from forming. Let the sauce cool to room temperature before storing in the refrigerator. When cold, the sauce will be thick enough to scoop with a spoon. To reheat, microwave at 30-second intervals until liquid, or heat over medium heat in heavy saucepan while stirring. Refrigerate for up to 3 weeks; freeze for up to 2 months.

"beautiful golden brown dessert" that emerges from the oven with a "mouthwatering aroma that interrupts the conversation." His introductions to each recipe are particularly charming and informative. Did you know that if you're whipping cream by hand, "use two whisks and it will whip twice as fast; use three and it will whip three times as fast. It really works!" Most recipes are accompanied by a brief note explaining how to master a particular technique. You'll learn how to fill a pastry bag, how to make vanilla sugar, why ganache sometimes separates, and how to fix it.

I couldn't resist making several tarts with a few of the recipes from the Basics chapter. The sugar dough makes a tender and light crust which I filled with zingy lemon curd for one tart and smooth pastry cream and berries for another. The recipes are all clearly explained, and you feel like

Torres is right beside you when he anticipates and assuages potential concerns: "Don't worry, the mixture will be lumpy and may separate. This is normal and occurs because there are not enough dry ingredients to hold the mixture together at this stage."

With elemental recipes successfully executed, I was eager to try more. I prepared Old Fashioned Macaroons to bring to an ailing friend. They were a snap to make, and she gobbled them up like candy. Crêpes with Caramelized Pears received a collective "mmm" at a dinner I made for visiting friends. Simple tender crêpes accented with lemon and orange were a delightful foil to pears sautéed in buttery caramel. And with suggestions from Torres on how to make the crêpes ahead of time, I was able to enjoy the company of my friends rather than toil away in the kitchen.

My quibbles with *Dessert*

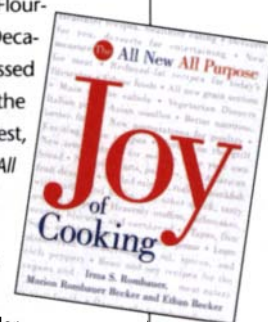
Circus lie in areas inherent to French pastry rather than in the book itself. All recipes are given in both metric and American measurements. I suspect most home cooks will use the American conversions, which I found awkward: 3 cups + 2 Tbs. milk; 1 cup + 1½ Tbs. flour; ½ cup + 2 Tbs. sugar. Also, some ingredients (such as pastry flour, almond flour, and cassis) were unavailable to home cooks or quite hard to locate.

Geared to the more serious home cook, *Dessert Circus* would make a welcome gift to an aspiring pastry chef, or to yourself as a primer on traditional and modern French pâtisserie. As for my bookshelves, they won't need to bear the burden of yet another cookbook: I plan to keep this one with me in the kitchen.

Joanne Chang is a sous-chef at Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro in New York City. ♦

Oh, what a Joy

Where can you find recipes for a Grilled Cheese Sandwich, Roasted Cactus Salad, Coq au Vin, Slow-Roasted Beef Rib Roast, Croissants de Boulanger, Potato Gnocchi, Bread Machine Pizza Dough, Pecan Lace, Paella Valenciana, Cherry Pie, and Flourless Chocolate Decadence? You guessed it—not the old, the older, or the oldest, but the *All New All Purpose Joy of Cooking*, published last fall by Scribner and already a bestseller.

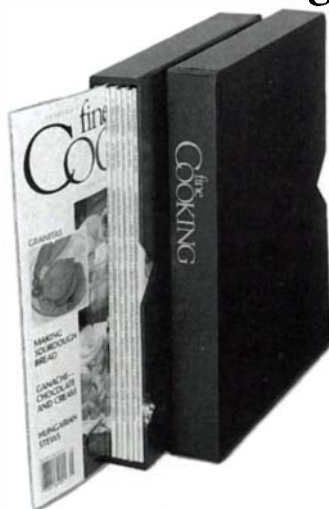


This *Joy*, under the direction of Scribner senior editor Maria Guamaschelli, consulting with Ethan Becker (Irma S. Rombauer's grandson) was a collaborative effort by a bevy of talented chefs and food writers, including *Fine Cooking* contributing editors Molly Stevens and Jim Peterson, as well as *Fine Cooking* test kitchen director Abby Dodge. The book retains the easy-to-read recipe format of the old *Joy*, yet it has 1,000 new illustrations accompanying over 4,000 (mostly new) recipes in more than 40 chapters. The range of recipes provides something for everyone, despite the elimination of some favorite recipes from previous versions. This new edition is the first revision in 22 years. *The All New All Purpose Joy of Cooking*, Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker, and Ethan Becker. Scribner, 1997. \$30, hardcover; 1136 pp. ISBN 0-684-81870-1.

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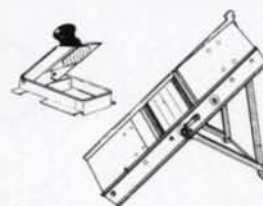
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Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Classic Roast Chicken w/Herb Sauce	33	640	360	45	10	40	13	16	8	160	440	1	based on 3-lb. chicken
Yogurt-Marinated Chicken	34	560	260	54	18	29	9	11	6	150	470	3	based on 3-lb. chicken
Roast Lemon Chicken	35	540	330	45	4	36	13	15	6	155	410	1	based on 3-lb. chicken
Linguine with Asparagus & Morels	38	1160	750	25	85	83	51	24	4	275	820	9	
Asparagus Bread Pudding	39	610	290	24	58	33	18	11	2	225	980	5	
Asparagus & Citrus Salad	39	150	60	5	21	7	1	5	1	0	5	6	
Wild Mushroom Risotto	44	620	240	15	75	27	16	8	1	65	1010	4	
Spinach & Herb Risotto	45	610	190	14	85	21	12	6	1	50	950	3	
Risotto of Sausage & Broccoli Raab	45	470	200	17	46	22	11	8	2	60	1160	2	
Spicy Pepitas	49	190	140	9	7	16	3	5	7	0	300	2	per ¼ cup
Potato & Rajas Taco Filling	49	210	150	5	12	16	8	7	1	40	230	2	filling for 1 taco
Citrus & Herb Chicken Taco Filling	50	60	20	7	2	2.5	0.5	1	0.5	25	600	0	filling for 1 taco
Pork Adobado Taco Filling	50	220	110	18	8	12	4	6	1	60	740	1	filling for 1 taco
Salsa Fresca	50	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	55	0	per Tbs.
Border Guacamole	51	35	30	1	2	3	0.5	2	0.5	0	75	1	per Tbs.
Tequila-Lime Sorbet	51	270	0	0	45	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	per ½ cup
Lemon Curd	54	50	25	1	7	3	1.5	1	0	30	5	0	per Tbs.
Scottish Shortbread	54	260	140	2	28	16	10	5	1	40	25	0	
Lamb Tagine	59	480	160	41	41	18	6	10	2	125	480	4	
California Roll	66	70	10	2	13	1	0	0.5	0	5	60	1	per piece
Tuna Roll	66	60	5	3	12	0.5	0	0	0	5	115	1	per piece
Butterscotch Sauce	71	80	35	0	12	4	2.5	1	0	10	100	0	per Tbs.
Nuts About Butterscotch Tartlets	71	740	370	10	89	41	18	14	7	95	430	4	
Butterscotch Crunch Ice Cream	72	440	160	6	65	17	9	6	1	275	230	0	per ½ cup
Butterscotch Pudding	72	460	320	6	30	36	21	11	2	330	450	0	
Butterscotch Baked Pears	73	490	290	2	53	33	20	10	1	100	310	4	
Chicken Breasts Stuffed w/Goat Cheese	90	340	160	39	1	18	7	8	2	110	520	0	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Cheese and Olives are Filled with Flavor

Boneless chicken breasts are a great starting point for a dinner that's quick to prepare. But chicken that's without skin and bones is also chicken that can use a little help in the flavor department. Stuffing chicken breasts with a tangy cheese mixture is a great way to add flavor. And it couldn't be easier: simply mix together a few ingredients, slit the chicken breasts, push the filling in with your fingers, and sauté.

To meet the challenge of keeping chicken breast moist, I've adapted a technique that I learned from Madeleine Kamman, which she calls pan-steaming. After browning one side of the chicken breasts, I turn them over and rest a pot lid that fits inside the frying pan right on top of the chicken. The lid prevents the steam from evaporating completely, keeping the chicken moist, yet because I'm not covering the entire

pan, the chicken continues to brown rather than steam.

Because the brown bits left in the pan are so delicious, I deglaze the pan with a little wine (homemade chicken stock also works) to make a glaze, which adds more flavor and moisture to the dish.

*Joanne Weir is a cookbook author and cooking teacher. Her most recent book, due in stores this spring, is *You Say Tomato* (Broadway Books, 1998). ♦*

For a simple, satisfying dinner, serve these stuffed chicken breasts with steamed green beans or broccoli.

Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Olives & Goat Cheese

This recipe is fun to play with. Try sun-dried tomatoes added to (or in place of) the olives. In the summer, I flavor the goat cheese with fresh herbs such as basil, chives, and mint. *Serves four.*

3 oz. fresh goat cheese
1 Tbs. milk
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbs. chopped flat-leaf parsley
Pinch crumbled dried oregano
Pinch dried chile flakes
1 Tbs. chopped kalamata or other good-quality black olives
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 6 oz. each)
2 Tbs. olive oil
½ cup dry white wine

In a small bowl, mash the goat cheese and milk together until smooth. Mix in the garlic, parsley, oregano, and chile flakes. Stir in the olives and season with salt and pepper.

On the thickest side of each breast, cut a deep, 3-inch-long pocket. Using your fingers, stuff the goat cheese mixture into each pocket. Close by pressing the flesh together, securing with a toothpick if necessary.

In a large frying pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Have ready a lid that's too small for the pan but will cover all the breasts. Cook the chicken on one side until golden brown, 5 to 6 min. Turn the breasts over, season with salt and pepper, and set the small lid on top of them. Continue to sauté until the chicken is cooked through, about another 10 min.

Transfer the chicken to a warm serving plate. Pour the wine into the pan and cook, scraping up the flavorful brown bits stuck to the pan, until it's reduced to a glossy syrup. Drizzle the reduction over the chicken and serve.



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Handcrafting Marshmallows for Rocky Road

Deep in San Francisco's Mission District lies the St. Francis Fountain, open since 1918 and operated continuously by the Christakes family. Lunch is served at the old-fashioned soda fountain in the front, while handmade candy is crafted in the back by proprietors David Milne and Jim Christakes. San Franciscans young and old have long made the special trip to St. Francis for its renowned "rocky road"—slabs of chocolate candy filled with walnuts and light pillows of marshmallow.



After the slabs of rocky road dry for half an hour, they're ready to be sold—and enjoyed.



Turnover is fast, so there's always fresh candy. "We cut the candy only as it's ordered because it tastes fresher that way, and customers can buy just a little taste if they want," says David Milne.



The marshmallow mixture, made of egg whites whipped with hot sugar syrup and a bit of gelatin, is poured into a paper-lined wooden frame to set for at least six hours.



A rolling cutter with thirteen blades cuts many cubes of marshmallow in just two passes. "People ask if we'd sell our marshmallows plain, but they'd harden because we use no preservatives—they need the chocolate coating."



Milne mixes the marshmallow pieces into a tempered chocolate and nut mixture. A cool marble surface allows him to work the candy quickly and easily.